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VOLUME 20



# THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF JOHANNES SCOTTUS ERIUGENA

BY

WILLEMIEN OTTEN



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## PREFACE

This book arose out of a theological dissertation defended at the University of Amsterdam in June, 1989. Its contents are the result of a few years spent on theological reflection. It is well known that Eriugena is a difficult thinker, and his dialectical way of presentation does not make it easy to discover the structure of his thought. Then to explain his dynamic thought-pattern in a crystallized form, as a book requires, was even more of a balancing act. I am very grateful to Professor L. M. de Rijk, my thesis-director, for providing me with clear and critical remarks throughout this process. They help warrant the philosophical accuracy of this book.

Years of solitary reflection would not have yielded this result, had there not been the productive counterpoise of teaching. I am very grateful to the Theological Faculty of the University of Amsterdam, which was my home base from May, 1986 to May, 1990. The opportunity to teach and participate in seminars with colleagues and students exploring medieval theology greatly contributed to my scholarly development. I hope to continue this exploration in the new environment of the Theological Faculty of Loyola University of Chicago.

While working on this book, I spent the summers of 1987 and 1988 in Toronto, Canada. After my stay there as a special student from 1983 to 1984, going back entailed the risk of exposing cherished memories to a confrontation with disappointing reality. This proved not at all to be the case. My Toronto friends, so diverse as Deborah Schlow, Eric Miltenburg, Amy Jo Cooper and Jeanne Johnson, have indeed remained my friends. In the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies and the Centre for Medieval Studies I always felt very welcome. I would like to extend my thanks especially to Professors Edouard Jauneau and Brian Stock for their friendly encouragement and support. In his capacity as external examiner, Professor Bernard McGinn of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago has also been extremely helpful in reading and commenting on my work.

I would furthermore like to thank Geert Brüsewitz and James Hawks for assisting me as *paranymphs* at my defence in June, 1989. I will always cheer Geert on in his pursuit of his own research interests. To James I am especially indebted, for he has been of invaluable assistance in improving my English. Since I insisted on staying close to the complexities and nuances of Eriugena's Latin, he did not have an easy task. He and Professor Alastair Hamilton have also kindly corrected my English translation

of various *Periphyseon* passages. For this I have used the Sheldon-Williams-O'Meara volume as an overall starting-point, but I often depart from it so as to bring out the connection with my analysis of Eriugena's discourse. This means that I alone can be held responsible for any flaws of the translations in this book.

The swift publication of this work is largely due to the efforts of Brill's series editor, Dr. Arjo Vanderjagt, who showed an interest in the manuscript even before it reached completion. This I have found to be a stimulating token of appreciation. To realize a project as this, however, one also needs financial resources. In the early stages of my studies, the «Fonds Doctor Catharine van Tussenbroek» helped me with a study-grant. To the «Hendrik Nannes en Catrijn Epes-leen» (Bolsward) and the «Stichting 'Aanpakken'» (Bloemendaal) I am extremely grateful for their assistance in helping me publish this book. Without their generous support it would have been virtually impossible to get an opportunity to reach a wider audience.

My gratefulness to Dr. M.B. Pranger cannot be subsumed under any of the above 'formal' categories. Not only has he been the initiator of this project, but also he has shown continuous support throughout the many stages of its development: as a supervisor and a discussion partner. I wish to express my thanks to you, Burcht, for a constant friendship which was one of equality even from its earliest beginnings, when I did not yet distinguish the contours of my own personality. In the course of time my viewpoints have sometimes assumed their own profile, but the thought that this friendship, springing as if from destiny, might not always be the same totally defies my imagination.

My studies form an organic part of what is in fact a broader life. Its theological and personal foundation I owe to my parents. Dick's company has turned it into a shared enterprise. One should regard this book as essentially belonging to the same enterprise. It should be seen, in the light of Eriugena, as a product of *humana ratio*, inasmuch as it reflects the desire to match the challenge of a project by the substance of one's work.

Chicago, October 1990

## INTRODUCTION

### *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena: The Study of Man in the Periphyseon*

This book consists of a study of the thought of Johannes Scottus Eriugena.<sup>1</sup> Of Eriugena's works the *Periphyseon*, the *magnum opus* of this ninth century Irish philosopher and theologian, will be the centre of my attention.<sup>2</sup> While analyzing the *Periphyseon*, interpreters of Eriugena's philosophy have had to stretch their imagination to the utmost to include its five books in one philosophical frame of reference, and have often failed. Therefore I have taken my starting-point in the *Periphyseon*'s unbroken literary structure, thereby trying to give an analysis of the author's overall ideas. In doing so, I have been led to choose one central theme, namely the study of Eriugena's anthropology,<sup>3</sup> the scope of which I will here try briefly to define.

The analysis of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* is by nature a historical enterprise. As such it has resulted first of all in an assessment of the early-medieval Christian context of Eriugena's views. Man in this early-medieval world was seen primarily as possessing a created, sinful state, and it is from this viewpoint that I have analyzed Eriugena's ideas. However, defining my purpose simply as the study of Eriugena's anthropology might suggest the analysis of man only in so far as he emerges as the clear object of the *Periphyseon*'s text. However important man as a direct topic of discussion may be, it is not this aspect that has warranted my attention for so long. Rather, during the course of this study I have developed the view that in the *Periphyseon* there is a more veiled presence of man, influencing the whole text. I have tried to trace the origins of this view of man. Without assuming any judgement on the part of my readers, I want to make it clear that, for me, the position of man as the leading character in the vast universe Eriugena evokes was only gradually revealed. It resulted in a complete change in my initial

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<sup>1</sup> The two standard biographies of Eriugena are Cappuyns 1933; J.J. O'Meara 1988.

<sup>2</sup> The text of *Periphyseon* Books I-III is taken from the Sheldon-Williams-edition. The text of Books IV and V is quoted from the Migne-edition PL 122, 741C-1022C.

<sup>3</sup> I have used the term 'anthropology' generally to indicate Eriugena's view of man within the context of his written works. Although throughout this study it will gradually be made manifest what I mean by this term, I want to make it clear from the very beginning that, unlike in earlier literature, I do not want to interpret 'anthropology' as psychology, as appears to be the case in Karpp 1950; Mathon 1964.

perspective of the *Periphyseon* as a treatise of primarily metaphysical importance. For it put a definite stop to any distinction between man as the object and man as the subject of Eriugena's thought, making him instead the overall centre of the *Periphyseon*'s universe. With this unifying view of man as the central character in the *Periphyseon*'s literary structure, I think we can legitimately regard the work as a coherent exposition of ideas.

Though one should always be careful about the impact of one's descriptions, I think regarding the *Periphyseon* from an anthropological viewpoint may have some effect in counterbalancing attempts which have explained the *Periphyseon* too readily either as a modern, idealistic system comparable to a Heideggerian model for example,<sup>4</sup> or as a statically layered, Neoplatonic universe of Proclean design.<sup>5</sup> One should read and interpret my comparison between Eriugena's confidence in man as he is positioned in an outstretched universe of divine origin, and the far more modern notion of Descartes' self-awareness of the thinking subject along these same lines.

In general, an awareness of the historical origin of Eriugena's system militates against any attempts to explain his ideas as predominantly based on outside influences. I hold that as a historical achievement the *Periphyseon* is fundamentally original to Eriugena, its ninth century author. However, this does not confine the significance of the *Periphyseon* to that of a remnant of what is essentially a bygone era. In this respect it is perhaps worthwhile to notice L. Kolakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism*, which links certain medieval views of dialectics, among which Eriugena's holds a most distinguished place, to modern 'class struggle'.<sup>6</sup> If any historical lines of development are to be traced at all, I would certainly favour a connection between this rather isolated ninth century body of thought and the broader stream of twelfth century ideas which R.W. Southern has subsumed under the heading of 'medieval humanism'.<sup>7</sup> It is especially the prominence of the reflective subject as well as the integration with surrounding nature, which I want to incorporate into my view of Eriugena's anthropology.

Before focusing on the position of man within the vast body of Eriugeni-an ideas, however, a few words on the general problem of undertaking a textual analysis of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* are needed. As it is generally held that information about the literary setting of a work enhances the un-

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<sup>4</sup> In his outlook on Eriugena's philosophy, Moran seems to be particularly interested in the relevance of his thought for modern, idealist philosophy, see Moran 1989: xii-xiv, 102, 184-185, 283-284.

<sup>5</sup> Cappuyns quotes Hauréau's statement about Eriugena as "un autre Proclus à peine chrétien", see Cappuyns 1933: 264. Hauréau's judgement can be seen as representative for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship on Eriugena.

<sup>6</sup> Kolakowski 1978: 23-30.

<sup>7</sup> Southern 1970: 29-60.

derstanding of the ideas which it conveys -which may also prove to be a useful and sensible starting-point for our forthcoming inquiry-, I want to point to some of the complications that are inherent in this specific Eriugenian text.

Among Eriugena's works the *Periphyseon* stands out as his most elaborate and most original piece of writing. That alone is sufficient reason always to study this work carefully, whatever the particular occasion for focusing on the author's thought may be. It will consequently receive substantial attention here, the more deservedly so since it contains extensive anthropological speculations. But the study of the *Periphyseon*, apart from taking up a proportionately large section of my book, reveals various wide-ranging consequences for my operational procedure in describing and analyzing Eriugena's view of man.

As for the position of man let me first of all explain the following. When studying man within the framework of the *Periphyseon*, one will find that man cannot simply be isolated as a creature of independent status. Reading this voluminous work, one has to notice that in it man clearly functions as a vital and integrated part of the whole complex of *natura*. Nature -to be more specific the division of nature- is ultimately what the *Periphyseon*, that great dialogue between a Master and his Student, is all about. It forms an explicit *physiologia*,<sup>8</sup> viz. a comprehensive study of nature, according to the author's own words. It is this very idea of nature which appears to be Eriugena's most universal concept not only in the *Periphyseon*, although in this work it receives undoubtedly its clearest expression, but in all of his works. It is therefore of central importance for the overall interpretation of Eriugena's thought, including his anthropology. Whatever conclusion about the position of man will be reached, whatever rambling speculations we will come across, we will always have to take into account that in the *Periphyseon* the description of man ultimately presupposes his position within the given context of *natura*.

Yet it is this context of *natura* which causes enormous interpretive problems in the *Periphyseon*, as there is no easy access to its true character. Eriugena's concept of nature is not a mere free-standing structure lending itself to immediate comprehension. While delineating *natura*'s various aspects, the *Periphyseon* can be seen to proceed by means of a typical way of reasoning, a characteristic use of argument propelling the unravelling of its dialogue. In his contemplation of *natura* Eriugena utilizes a rarefied dialectical method that is inextricably interwoven with the presentation of

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<sup>8</sup> Eriugena mentions the word *physiologia* explicitly in *Per.* IV 741C; 750A. For the introduction and elucidation of the term *physiologia* as a systematic tool for the description of the Eriugenian enterprise in this work, with specific philosophical consequences, see D.J. O'Meara 1981: 142-145.

his material. I intend to show this explicitly when undertaking an analysis of the prologue to the *Periphyseon*. This state of coalescence of subject-matter and dialectical form characterizes the *Periphyseon*'s effective textual harmony in that it not only balances the various digressions which repeatedly break up Eriugena's discursive ratiocination, but essentially unites them in providing the sole means of expression for his theory of nature.

I want to stress that the particular character of the *Periphyseon*'s text affects the author's standpoint on the issue of man in practically the same manner as it influences the description of all other aspects of *natura*. Man, who has been identified as an integral part of nature occupying a central position in its hierarchical organization, can only legitimately be portrayed as such against the background of the *Periphyseon*'s compositional structure. Thus Eriugena's anthropology is found firmly embedded in the overall setting of his wide-ranging physiological ideas, which through their remarkable dialectical arrangement came to build the edifice called the *Periphyseon*. Hence I want to analyze it by means of a hermeneutical approach that ultimately refers to Eriugena's dialectical view of *natura* and rejects the artificial isolation of man from his 'natural' universe. *In nuce* this sums up my starting-point. In the course of my study anthropology and physiology will continue to be closely connected, because man plays a crucial role in the dialectical evolution of *natura*, which is Eriugena's main theme.

Yet the ties between man and nature, however narrow, do not in themselves explain why it is through the figure of man that one should approach Eriugena's complex ideas in the *Periphyseon*. My conviction in this matter is that it is particularly through the analysis of man that the wide spectrum of Eriugena's ideas about nature receives some focus. Studying the role of man, one becomes inevitably aware of the central question around which the work's argument revolves. This question, which arises out of the course of Eriugena's thought, can be traced back to the ambiguity that is inherent in human rationality ever since the fall of the first man. Let me illustrate how this applies to the *Periphyseon*.

It is clear that in the *Periphyseon natura* functions as the author's most universal concept, with which he expresses the reality of all things and through which he wants to investigate it. However, despite the gigantic scope of nature, it appears that the human mind, while contained by it like the rest of the world including God, serves as its leading principle. After all, *natura* is the sum total of all that is and that is not, whereby the fundamental difference between being and non-being is based solely on the comprehensive capacities of the human mind. This daring cosmology pivoting on human insight is generally seen as one of the most remarkable and innovative feats of the *Periphyseon*.

Little attention, however, has so far been paid to the fact that the success of this cosmology is connected to the efficacy of human rationality. While the course of the *Periphyseon* on the one hand presupposes and asserts the efficacy of man's mind, on the other it is precisely this rationality which comes severely under fire when Eriugena studies man within the context of Christian exegesis. In the *Periphyseon*'s exegesis of Genesis man's reason proves fallible on account of sin. For in accordance with the Greek tradition Eriugena holds that, as a result of sin, man falls from an intellectual life to a life disabled and fragmented by its dependence on the senses. This puts the rational investigation of nature undertaken in this work severely at risk.

If we give full weight to the crucial position of the human mind in the context of nature, the following dilemma presents itself to us. We could have to interpret *natura* as a sheer figment of the human imagination without traceable links with the world outside, let alone with God. In this case Eriugena's metaphysical design in the *Periphyseon* can only be bypassed as a total failure. If, on the other hand, the *Periphyseon* is not to be seen as an exploded theory, Eriugena must find some way of coping with the problem of human sin. Only when he gives a satisfactory explanation for the problem of human sin is there a chance that the integrity and the efficacy of the human mind can be salvaged.

The problem brought out here by the study of Eriugena's anthropology is thus in fact the early-medieval counterpart of the traditional theodicy question in the age of the Fathers. For Eriugena the central problem is not why God brought evil into this world, but rather why it is that man lacks the means to execute his creative potential as the image of God in a near-divine attempt to restore the world to its original beauty. It is this shift of perspective that seems to distinguish Eriugena from his patristic predecessors. What this shift of perspective entails for Eriugena seems to be best brought out in the study of his anthropology, which reveals the potential as well as the shortcomings of human reason. The dominant role of human reason in this work does not need to be commented upon; after all, it is as an instant of reflection that Eriugena opens the *Periphyseon*.<sup>9</sup>

As has been illustrated above, most attention will be given to Eriugena's main work. Yet emphasis on the *Periphyseon* by no means rules out Eriugena's other works. On the contrary, the all-embracing character of the *Periphyseon*, which by the unlimited number of topics that it covers actually mirrors the inclusive range of nature itself, serves as an inducement to group the other works around it. As these may contain valuable additional materials for the reconstruction of the author's universe, they

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<sup>9</sup> *Per.* I 441A, Sh.-W.: 36: *Saepe mihi cogitanti...*



should ultimately be interpreted in the light of what is not only Eriugena's most universal but also his most distinctive exposition of ideas with regard to *natura*. Of course, some works preceded the *Periphyseon* and others came after. Some writings are of an entirely different nature, such as the translations and the commentaries, not to mention his remarkable poetry. But despite these general considerations of chronology and literary genre, there is the same atmosphere of Eriugenian reasoning pervading them. This makes them in a sense dependent on the *Periphyseon*, the unequalled spaciousness of which provides the main focus of orientation for their explanation and interpretation. In general, Eriugena's other works should therefore be analyzed especially in terms of their similarities and differences with the *Periphyseon*, regarding the specific relation between human nature and universal nature.

These introductory reflections lead to the following approach. I will start out by focusing on some major structural characteristics of the *Periphyseon* concerning Eriugena's explication of nature, in particular the rational method that is involved. Subsequently, I intend to examine to what extent the prevailing features of the *Periphyseon*'s physiology implicitly determine Eriugena's treatment of man, who is not to make his actual appearance on the stage until Book IV. My general survey of Eriugena's methodological approach as regards the description of nature and of its specific bearing on the portrayal of man will together supply the necessary philosophical equipment fully to comprehend and interpret man in the larger setting of *natura*. It is then that I shall return to this book's central theme and resume the investigation of Eriugena's anthropology in a more detailed manner.

## CHAPTER ONE

### DIVISION, DEFINITION AND RETURN. AN INQUIRY INTO THE PROLOGUE OF THE *PERIPHYSEON*

#### 1.1. *The First Division of Natura: Division and Definition*

Setting out to study Eriugena's view of man within the context of the *Periphyseon*, one should as a matter of course be concerned first of all with this work's main theme, namely *natura*.<sup>1</sup> The above-mentioned designation of man as a vital and integrated part of nature secures the relevance of an analysis of *natura* to Eriugena's anthropology. *Natura* is the constant theme throughout the *Periphyseon*. Yet on only one occasion does it receive explicit treatment. Whereas all Eriugena's speculations belong inside the scope of *natura* in one way or another, it is only in the prologue to Book I that the concept of *natura* receives some sort of definition; that is to say, a definition by means of a division.

To elucidate *natura* as the continuous frame of reference for all our observations regarding Eriugena's view of man, let us turn to the beginning of Book I. The *Periphyseon* begins as follows:

*Master:* Often as I ponder and investigate, to the best of my ability, with ever greater care the fact that the first and foremost division of all things that can either be perceived by the mind or transcend its grasp is into things that are and things that are not, a general name for all these things suggests itself which is φύσις in Greek or *natura* in Latin. Or do you have another opinion?

*Student:* No, I definitely agree. For when entering upon the path of reasoning, I also find that this is so.

M. Is nature then the general name, as we have said, of all the things that are and that are not?

S. That is true. For nothing at all can occur in our thoughts that could fall outside this name. (*Per.* I 441A, Sh.-W.:36)

In these opening phrases Eriugena undeniably lives up to the expectations inspired by the *Periphyseon*'s Latin name: *De divisione naturae*. It is this title which since the publication of the *editio princeps* by Thomas Gale in 1681, has drawn an ever-increasing number of readers to the work's many-sided philosophy.<sup>2</sup> In its opening lines the *Periphyseon* presents the

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<sup>1</sup> For information about Boethius' employment of this term to give an all-embracing representation of the universe, and its sophisticated reshaping by Eriugena on the basis of Dionysian ideas, see D.J. O'Meara 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Gale's edition is largely based on ms. Trinity College O.5.20, thought to have been

notions of *natura* and *divisio* as totally interrelated, to the extent that they ultimately condition each other. Instead of starting out from a fixed totality, it is through a process of division that the Master contrives to present a definition of *natura* as a universal concept. He predicates *natura* as the general name of all things that are and that are not. Through the complementary character of being and non-being this implicitly constitutes an exhaustive totality.

However, the division into being and non-being that makes out *natura*'s fundamental structure,<sup>3</sup> does not automatically derive from the notion of *natura*. It obviously arises from the earlier distinction between things that can be grasped by the mind and things that extend beyond the mind's reach, on which it therefore completely relies. Since the latter distinction depends on the range of the *animus*, the human mind appears to be the dominating factor in a double-edged diversification process, which is ultimately constitutive of the *Periphyseon*'s concept of *natura*. In the Master's opinion, the undefined universality of all things (*omnes res*) can only find a meaningful expression if it is submitted to the explorative and discriminating scrutiny of the mind, whereupon it becomes the focus of renewed and even intensified interest. It is now worthy of receiving an explicit division, *viz.* into being and non-being, and an appropriate universal name to go with it. Thus the concept of *natura* can be said to result from an explicit rational starting-point, as is found confirmed in the Student's reply to the Master's opening statement. Notwithstanding the fact that the whole prologue is introduced as a moment of pondering on the part of the author,<sup>4</sup> this rational starting-point remains a major point of interest. In fact, it is precisely within this suggestively indicated context of reflection that Eriugena's explicated rationality gains all the more relief.

Let me summarize our observations so far. As has been made clear, Eriugena arrives at his definition of *natura* through the establishment of a division into being and non-being underpinned and qualified by a preparatory distinction that pivots upon the investigatory power of the human mind. It is this central function of the *animus* as a useful and effective criterion of the author's progress in his forthcoming inquiry of *natura*

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edited by William of Malmesbury. In this manuscript the work is referred to as *Περὶ φύσεως* and *Περὶ φύσεως μερισμοῦ*; it begins with the words '*Incipit Liber primus periphyseon merismou .i. de divisione naturae*'. In his printed edition Gale adopted this Latin explanation of the title: *Ioannis Scoti Eriigenae de Divisione Naturae libri quinque, diu desiderati*, Oxford 1681. It is under this Latin name that the work has since been most widely known. See *Per. I*, Sh.-W.: 5-10.

<sup>3</sup> For details about the background of Eriugena's sources on the use of being and non-being, notably Marius Victorinus, see Piemonte 1986.

<sup>4</sup> The whole setting of the *Periphyseon*'s arguments is ultimately ruled by the introductory words: *Saepe mihi cogitanti*.... However, because of their Ciceronian origin, the use of these words seems to have become a kind of literary 'topos', see Cappuyns 1933: 197.

which one ought to keep in mind when pursuing the study of the *Periphyseon*. My first tentative conclusion, therefore, is that Eriugena bases his first and foremost division of *natura*, through which he simultaneously coins this universal notion, on the judicial capacity of his rational faculty. We therefore need to determine the precise impact of the author's appropriation of reason with regard to the development of his concept of *natura*.

Somewhat further on in the prologue Eriugena gives more specific details about this first and foremost division of *natura* into things that are and things that are not. His remarks are of special importance here, since they underline the close connection between *natura*'s primordial division and the rational distinction supporting it. In other words, they strengthen the intrinsic attachment of the categories of being and non-being to the radius of the human mind. The passage in question runs as follows:

M. This primordial difference then, separating all things, requires for itself five modes of interpretation. Of these five modes the first seems to be that by which reason convinces us that all things which submit to sensual or intellectual perception are truly and rationally said to be, whereas those which, because of their excellent nature, escape not only the senses' grasp but also that of reason and intellect seem rightly not to be. These latter things are correctly understood only in God, in matter and in the reasons and essences of all things that are created by him. And rightly so; for he who alone truly is, the same one is the essence of all things, as Dionysius the Areopagite says. 'For,' says he, 'the being of all things is the divinity above all being.' With many arguments Gregory the Theologian also confirms that no substance or essence of a visible or invisible creature can be understood by intellect or reason for what it is. For just as God himself, being in himself beyond every creature, is comprehended by no intellect, so is he also incomprehensible when considered in the hidden depths of the creature made by him and existing in him. But whatever in any creature is either perceived by the bodily sense or considered by the intellect is only a kind of accident to its essence, which is in itself, as we have said, incomprehensible, but as regards which it can be known through quality or quantity, form or matter or some sort of difference, place or time not what it is but that it is. This, then, is the first and foremost mode of division of the things which are said to be and not to be. (*Per.* I 443A-C, Sh.-W.:38-40)

According to the Master the first and foremost division of *natura*, which effectively separates the things that are from the things that are not, has apparently five modes of interpretation. Only the first of these has been quoted here, the reason being that it manifestly applies the same criterion as the primordial division in the *Periphyseon*'s opening sentence. Again it reveals the powerful role of the human mind, as it lays down the foundation for Eriugena's concept of *natura*. Within the scope of *natura* the mind functions as the critical authority, by means of which Eriugena distinguishes between the predication of being and non-being according to

whether or not something is apprehended by the senses or the intellect. Although Eriugena introduces the activity of the corporeal sense alongside that of human reason or intellect (as the equivalent of *animus*), in the final analysis its effect will definitely be subordinate to the higher critical standard of the human mind.

So far this passage confirms the impression previously extracted from the *Periphyseon*'s opening phrases. It holds on to the central role of the human mind in the context of *natura*, adding yet more information about the connotations of this first division. While loosely associating being with rational understanding, Eriugena goes on to identify the objects which, being screened by the mind, are allocated explicitly to the realm of non-being. Apart from matter,<sup>5</sup> which for the present I intend to leave outside my analysis, this concerns only God and the reasons and essences of all created things. Eriugena ultimately considers the latter as unattainable modifications of the divine, lying dormant in creation. This understanding is implicit in the statement that God is incomprehensible both in himself and when contemplated in the hidden depths of creation made by him and existing in him.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it seems justified to conclude that in fact God is the only entity successfully escaping the mind's far-reaching sphere of influence. The reason for this, as stated in the text, lies in the excellence of God's nature, accounting for his final incomprehensibility beyond the reach of any rational standard.

By ascribing God's escape from the mind's grasp and his consequent non-being to his excellent nature (*excellencia suae naturae*), Eriugena interprets the negation of being as superior to being. God's *non esse* articulates his essential transcendence of being, just as his inability to be grasped by the mind marks the fact that he surpasses all human understanding. The quotation of Pseudo-Dionysius' maxim (*esse omnium est super esse divinitas*)<sup>7</sup> is even more revealing, for it aptly illustrates that God's transcendence of being intimates an inclusive and even formative kind of superiority rather than having an exclusively negative effect. The divine excellence discloses a surplus of being, the overflowing profusion of which allows for and

<sup>5</sup> The reading *materiaque* in this passage is uncertain. It is found in ms P (Paris, Bibl. Nat. lat. 12964) only, where it was probably added under the influence of glosses, see *Per. I*, Sh.-W.: 223 n.14. See also Allard 1987: 246 n.57. Allard opposes Sheldon-Williams' view that if the reading of *materiaque* were to be retained, it would put God and matter on the same level. He holds that, although they are both labelled as non-being, there are no further points of connection pertaining to their ontological similarities.

<sup>6</sup> *Per. I* 443B, Sh.-W.: 38-40: *Nam sicut ipse deus in seipso... nullo intellectu comprehenditur ita etiam in secretissimis creaturae ab eo factae et in eo existentis consideratus incomprehensibilis est.*

<sup>7</sup> This maxim (Ps.-Dionysius, *Cael. Hier. IV*, 1, PG 3, 177D) is found several times in the *Periphyseon*: I 516C, Sh.-W.: 204; III 644A-B, Sh.-W.: 84; V 903B-C. For an existential or ontic interpretation of Eriugena's use of *esse* and *super esse* rather than an essential one, see Allard 1982.

guarantees the existence of all other forms of being. It is on account of the very excellence of his non-being that God surpasses and thereby eventually creates all being. Non-being and being are indissolubly connected, to the extent that God is indicated as the efficient cause of the complete universe.

Besides clarifying the particular qualities of both concepts, the assumption of a causal connection between being and non-being indirectly sheds more light on Eriugena's idea of universal nature. It suggests that *natura* should be interpreted against the traditional background of patristic and medieval Christianity, according to which the universe generally consists of God and creation. Although in the *Periphyseon* *natura*'s most outstanding feature is its division into being and non-being, it is implied that beneath nature's extraordinary appearance God and creation form its well-known constituent parts. Through a differently shaped terminology Eriugena still appears to point back to traditional patterns.

Being, viewed in association with rational understanding, is predicated of the realm of creation, while non-being refers to God. Yet something of the divine transcendence must be persistent in creation. This may be inferred from the middle position of the reasons and essences of created things, which to a certain extent share in God's creating nature. But following Gregory the Theologian,<sup>8</sup> Eriugena also states that the substance or essence of created things, whether visible or invisible, can never be apprehended as to what it is by means of the intellect or reason. What can be known through the employment of reason is merely accidental to a thing's unfathomable ground of being. The Aristotelian categories inform us in various ways of a thing's existence (*quia est*), but they do not succeed in unveiling a thing's real nature or essence (*quid est*). Although on the whole creation can be understood by human reason, the true grounds of created being remain utterly concealed from man. According to the first interpretive mode the reasons and essences therefore receive the predicate of non-being. In their capacity of latent manifestations of the divine they are ranked alongside God, equally transcending human understanding. Eriugena deliberately eliminates any privative interpretation of non-being,<sup>9</sup> as if once more stressing his conscious allegiance to the mind as the only valid criterion by which to discern between being and non-being. Any form of non-being which does not have a proper subsistence based

<sup>8</sup> Eriugena repeatedly confuses Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, although he is apparently aware that they are two different theologians. By 'Gregory the Theologian' he commonly refers to Gregory of Nazianzus. See *Per.* I, Sh.-W.: 223 n.16.

<sup>9</sup> *Per.* I 443C, Sh.-W.: 40: *Iste igitur modus primus ac summus est divisionis eorum quae dicuntur esse et non esse. Quia ille qui videtur quodam modo esse, qui in privationibus et substantiarum et accidentium constituitur, nullo modo recipiendus, ut arbitror.*

on its transcendence of the human mind cannot be included in this first mode of interpretation.

After the first mode of being and non-being, four more modes follow, the detailed explanation of which need not concern us here. But I would like to make some general remarks concerning their dependence on the first mode of interpretation. In the first mode Eriugena introduced the predicates of being and non-being as indicative of his positive rational outlook on the universe. We will find that in the other interpretative modes the division into things that are and things that are not does not always cover the entire range of *natura*, that is, including both God and creation. Furthermore, it is only in the first mode that we encounter the criterion of rationality in the radicality which was explained above. The fourth mode seems to come close, inasmuch as it predicates true being only of things that can be understood by the intellect.<sup>10</sup> But it is precisely in its description of non-being that this mode strikingly differs from the first, thereby indirectly revealing that it has a much narrower purport. From the objects referred to as non-being, namely all things in the spatio-temporal world which through generation and material motions are in a constant state of flux,<sup>11</sup> it appears that this mode is ultimately based on a Platonic concept of being as it combines intelligibility with the aspect of immutability. In this respect it is quite illustrative that Eriugena prefaces this mode with the additional comment *secundum philosophos*. Perhaps it suggests a latent criticism.<sup>12</sup>

The second and third mode of interpretation may be summarized as follows. The second mode predicates being and non-being in accordance with an assumed interdependence between the hierarchical orders of creation (*inferioris enim affirmatio superioris est negatio itemque inferioris negatio superioris est affirmatio*); God is left altogether outside the scope of this mode.<sup>13</sup> The third mode derives from the distinction between hidden causes and visible effects,<sup>14</sup> classifying them as non-being and being respectively. As in the second mode, the multitude of causes and effects

<sup>10</sup> Per. I 445 B, Sh.-W.: 44: *Quartus modus est qui secundum philosophos non improbabilius ea solummodo quae solo comprehenduntur intellectu dicitur esse.*

<sup>11</sup> Per. I 445B-C, Sh.-W.: 44: *Quae vero per generationem materiae distentionibus seu detractionibus locorum quoque spatiis temporumque motibus variantur colliguntur solvuntur vere dicuntur non esse, ut sunt omnia corpora quae nasci et corrumpi possunt.*

<sup>12</sup> The interpretation of the predicate *secundum philosophos* as a sign of Eriugena's mistrust is suggested by G.-H. Allard, see Allard 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Per. I 444A, Sh.-W.: 40: *Fiat igitur secundus modus essendi et non essendi qui in naturarum creaturarum ordinibus atque differentiis consideratur...*

<sup>14</sup> Per. I 444C, Sh.-W.: 42: *Tertius modus non incongrue inspicitur in his quibus huius mundi visibilis plenitudo perficitur et in suis causis praecedentibus in secretissimis naturae sinibus.*

refers to the realm of creation only.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, both these modes operate a distinction between being and non-being with rather less incisive impact than is brought about by the criterion of rational understanding applied in the first mode. They are definitely subordinate to this first mode, inasmuch as they appear to be mere logical specifications of this same distinction. The second mode confines the significance of what can or cannot be understood to the relative opposition of affirmation and denial. The third mode flattens its interpretation to the simple contrast between hidden causes and manifest effects, with the apparent intention of indicating a status of either potentiality or actuality.

The fifth mode, finally, is of particular interest with regard to Eriugena's anthropology since it pertains exclusively to human nature.<sup>16</sup> Man in the state of sin is proclaimed not to be, for on account of sin he has fallen down from being into a kind of non-subsistence. However, through grace administered by Christ he can be restored to his former state of being. Throughout this mode Eriugena associates being with man's original created state, intimating thereby that it is clearly the biblical description of man as *imago dei* that lies at the basis of this interpretation of being and non-being. Rather than the application of any logical distinction this fifth mode reveals man's dependence on God's mercy by which he can regain his lost honour. In its purport of salvific intentionality it stands somewhat aloof from the other modes.<sup>17</sup>

To concentrate once more on the *Periphyseon*'s introduction of *natura*, we should now return to its familiar opening phrases for a final analysis. Initially I described the prologue as Eriugena's division and definition of *natura*, the aspect of definition involving the assessment of the whole, the aspect of division involving the fundamental dichotomy between things that are and things that are not. In the *Periphyseon*'s opening passage the human mind could be seen to determine the process of definition as well as of division, inasmuch as it embodies their connecting-link. It is only through the distinction between things that can be grasped by the mind and things that exceed its grasp that Eriugena advances to present his primordial division of *natura*, deftly contriving to conceptualize the whole

<sup>15</sup> In ms. P Eriugena summarizes the difference between the first and the third mode of interpretation as follows: *Inter primum et tertium hoc distat: primus generaliter in omnibus qui simul et semel in causis et effectibus facta sunt; secundus specialiter in his quae partem adhuc in causis suis latent, partim in effectibus patent, quibus proprie mundus iste contextitur* (Per. I 445A-B, Sh.-W.: 42).

<sup>16</sup> Per. I 445C, Sh.-W.: 44: *Quintus modus est quem in sola humana natura ratio intuetur, quae cum divinae imaginis dignitatem in qua proprie substitit peccando deseruit merito esse suum perdidit et ideo dicitur non esse.*

<sup>17</sup> Per. I 445C, Sh.-W.: 44: *dum vero unigeniti filii dei gratia restaurata ad primum suae substantiae statum in qua secundum imaginem dei condita est reducit, incipit esse et in eo qui secundum imaginem dei conditus est inchoat vivere.*



in an all-embracing concept. In the first interpretive mode Eriugena further elucidates the precise implications of this division.

As to an exact definition of nature the author evidently leaves us in the dark. Although placing the things that are and the things that are not -that is God and creation- within a universal concept, he does not define its scope. He merely arrives at *natura* as the collective name to encompass both being and non-being,<sup>18</sup> while he describes his rational procedure restrictively by the process of division. A closer look at Eriugena's speculations on the notion of definition, so conspicuous in the prologue by its absence, may throw some light on what is undoubtedly a remarkable approach in framing the concept of nature. Reason appears to be playing a central role therein.

Eriugena broaches the issue of definition in the course of his discussion of the Aristotelian categories and their potential applicability to God, to which a large part of Book I is devoted.<sup>19</sup> Definition, in the view expressed in this context, is linked closely to the category of place. As interchangeable notions each one fundamentally determines the other.<sup>20</sup> Eriugena alternately calls place the natural definition of a creature, and definitions the places of circumscribed things. Thus he comes to designate the distinguishing feature in both, stating 'whether one call it place or

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<sup>18</sup> *Per.* I 441A, Sh.-W.: 36: ...*horum omnium generale vocabulum occurrit quod graece φύσις, latine vero natura vocitatur. An tibi aliter videtur?*

<sup>19</sup> The discussion of the Aristotelian categories starts in *Per.* I 463A, Sh.-W.: 84 and despite various interruptions and insertions it drags on till the end of Book I (524B, Sh.-W.: 220). Such a concatenation of various subjects interwoven in the actual treatment of one theme is typical of the *Periphyseon's* dialogue.

<sup>20</sup> One can derive the close connection between definition and place from various statements in Book I. To give some examples:

-*Per.* I 470C, Sh.-W.: 100-102: *Si enim nil aliud locus sit nisi terminus atque diffinitio uniuscuiusque finitae naturae profecto locus non appetit ut in aliquo sit, sed omnia quae in eo sunt ipsum merito terminum finemque suum semper desiderant, in quo naturaliter continentur et sine quo in infinitum fluere videntur.*

-*Per.* I 474B, Sh.-W.: 110: *Locus sequitur qui, ut paulo ante diximus, in diffinitionibus rerum quae diffiniri possunt constituitur. Nil enim aliud est locus nisi ambitus quo unumquodque certis terminis concluditur.*

-*Per.* I 478B, Sh.-W.: 118: *locus vero nil aliud est nisi rerum quae certo fine terminantur ambitus atque conclusio.*

-*Per.* I 483B, Sh.-W.: 130: *Ac per hoc concluditur nil aliud esse locum nisi naturalem diffinitionem modumque positionemque uniuscuiusque sive generalis sive specialis creaturae...*

-*Per.* I 483C, Sh.-W.: 130: *Nam nil aliud appetit, quantum mihi datur intelligere, quam ut nihil esse locum suadeat nisi naturalem uniuscuiusque creaturae diffinitionem, intra quam tota continetur et extra quem nullo modo extenditur. Ac per hoc datur intelligi sive locum quis dixerit sive finem sive terminum sive diffinitionem sive circumscriptionem unum idipsumque significare, ambitum videlicet finitae naturae.*

-*Per.* I 485B, Sh.-W.: 134: *ideoque ubi diffinitiones sunt eorum quae diffiniuntur ibi profecto et loci eorum quae circumscribuntur. Praedictis enim rationibus confectum est locum diffinitionem esse et diffinitionem locum.*

limit or term or definition or circumscription, one and the same thing is denoted, namely the confine of a finite nature' (*ambitum finitae naturae*, *Per.* I 483C, Sh.-W.: 130).

Definitions, like places, indicate a thing's enclosure (*ambitum*), but can do so only with regard to finite natures or creatures, God thus being demonstrably excluded. As Eriugena goes on to explain, definitions rank among the invisibles as things that are understood and understand at the same time. The act of defining, i.e. of surrounding, that which is understood so as to grasp its essence, is the act of a reasoning and understanding nature, because in order to define it needs to be aware of its own existence.<sup>21</sup> As such it is amongst creation the prerogative of men and angels, who are the sole possessors of the faculty of the intellect.<sup>22</sup> Since that which defines is greater than that which is defined, men and angels, equally possessing reason, can define neither themselves nor each other. They are entitled to define only what is ranked below them while they themselves can only be defined by God.<sup>23</sup>

So far we have discussed a small but important part of Eriugena's account of definition. Through his cumulative arguments he deals with the nature of definition and place almost exhaustively. In fact his representative characterization of place as a thing's natural definition, within which it is wholly contained and beyond which it by no means extends (*intra quam [sc. diffinitionem] tota continetur et extra quam nullo modo extenditur*, *Per.* I 483C, Sh.-W.: 130) appears to cover his own explanations rather accurately. At first sight this statement could well apply to Eriugena's procedure in the *Periphyseon*'s prologue also, if one could but allow the predicative *tota* to govern all of nature instead of creation alone. Eriugena made it clear that one can give a definition of a finite creature only, the reason for this apparently consisting in the rational purpose of all definition, which in order to

<sup>21</sup> *Per.* I 484D-485A, Sh.-W.: 132:

N. *Itaque in genere invisibilium diffinitiones quas locos rerum circumscriptorum diximus concludi arbitraris?*

A. *Ita quidem arbitror et nil certius video.*

N. *Recte aestimas. Sed quia iterum genus invisibilium in multas species dividi patitur, quaedam enim invisibilium sunt quae intelliguntur et intelligunt, quaedam intelliguntur et non intelligunt, quaedam neque intelliguntur neque intelligunt, in qua specie horum diffinitiones connumerandas esse censes?*

A. *In ea profecto quae intelligit et intelligitur; actio siquidem diffinitionis ratiocinantis intelligentisque naturae actio est.*

N. *Nec aliter videtur esse posse; nulla enim natura quae se ipsam non intelligit esse aut sui aequalem aut se inferiore potest diffinire.*

<sup>22</sup> *Per.* I 485A, Sh.-W.: 132: A. *Solius ergo intellectualis naturae quae in homine angeloque constituitur diffinitionis peritia est.*

<sup>23</sup> *Per.* I 485B, Sh.-W.: 132-134: N. (Talking about men and angels) *Videtur mihi neque se ipsos neque inter se invicem diffinire posse. Nam si homo se ipsum vel angelum diffinit maior se ipso est et angelo. Maius enim est quod diffinit quam quod diffinitur. Eadem de angelo est ratio. Hos itaque ab ipso solo qui eos ad imaginem suam condidit diffiniri posse arbitror.*

vouchsafe the understanding of that which it sets out to define, must distinctly mark the outline of its object. Therefore that which defines needs to be greater than the object that is defined.

Although on the surface Eriugena's general assessment of *natura* complies with his interpretation of the act of definition, he still leaves out any reference whatsoever to the term. The breadth of *natura* must of course be held responsible for this. By simply establishing a definition of *natura*, in which both God and creation were to be incorporated, Eriugena would have irrevocably violated the rules of definition, since these are concerned with framing the limited scope of creation only. In sum, the all-embracing concept of *natura* as advocated in the *Periphyseon*'s prologue manifestly obstructs the imposition of fixed boundaries, which would confine its inherent expansiveness. The innate vastness of *natura* ranges beyond the scope of definition itself.

Since the road to appropriating *natura* through definition is thwarted, the question arises of how Eriugena proceeds now that the universality of his object seems completely to defy the powers of human reason. Definition, after all, is pre-eminently a rational act. However, I want to suggest that regarding the attempt to ground the concept of *natura*, Eriugena, although forced by the 'nature' of his object not to proceed through definition, not only uncompromisingly upholds, but can even be seen to intensify the actual objectives of essential definition (οὐσιώδης).<sup>24</sup> It seems as if it is Eriugena's striking awareness of the specific potential of human reason which prompts him to take recourse in a better and more effective method than that of definition. His intentions being the same, he does not relinquish the ambition to encompass all things within the range of a single concept, as required by the act of definition. But his poignant confidence in human rationality, clearly suggested in the *Periphyseon*'s prologue by his launching of the study of *natura* from the starting-point of the mind, results in an approach that leads him away from defining the universe's bounds. His choice is for a dividing-line rather than a line of circumference, for an approach through 'unclosing' division rather than the enclosure implied by the act of definition.

In the prologue, therefore, Eriugena can be seen to proceed through this unusual process of division, describing *natura* as the general name of

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<sup>24</sup> *Per.* I 483C-D, Sh.-W.: 130: *Quamvisque multae diffinitionum species quibusdam esse videantur, sola ac vere ipsa dicenda est diffinitio quae a Grecis οὐσιώδης, a nostris vero essentialis, vocari consuevit. Aliae siquidem aut connumerationes intelligibilium partium οὐσιώδης ut argumentationes quaedam extrinsecus per accidentia aut qualescunque sententiarum species sunt, sola vero οὐσιώδης id solum recipit ad diffiniendum quod perfectionem naturae quam diffinitio complet ac perficit. Diffinitio enim, ut ait Augustinus, nihil maius nihil minus tenet quam id quod susceptum est ad explicandum; aliter omnino vitiosa est.*

all things that are and that are not. Since the method of division, as indicated, springs from the discriminatory activity of the human mind, we find the *animus* functioning as the exclusive operative principle for the disclosure of *natura* in what will consequently be a rational investigation.<sup>25</sup> It is through this dissecting employment of rationality in the act of division that Eriugena remarkably refines the method of definition, thereby establishing a better grasp of his ultimate object. In this light I will now briefly analyze his examination of the concept of *natura*.

Eriugena establishes *natura* by dividing it into being and non-being rather than defining it. The momentum of his argument relies emphatically on the aspect of division, which in this manner fully conditions his approach to universal nature both in framing the whole and in structuring its parts. From the very beginning Eriugena already conceived the totality of the universe in a nuanced fashion, since he posited the differentiation of all things on the basis of their submission to or transcendence of the human mind. Thus he committed himself unconditionally to the so-called criterion of rationality, on which his explicit division of *natura* completely depends, for it merely reiterates the rational distinction in ontological terms. Consequently, as was demonstrated before, human reason lies at the core of Eriugena's view of *natura*, since its very notion could only be developed because of the forceful dynamism of the mind. Not only does it form its ultimate founding principle, which has been made sufficiently clear, but it also functions as its centre of gravity, since the whole range of *natura* appears to be directed towards the human mind for its ultimate orientation. Whether things can be grasped by the human mind or not, they must without exception be placed in this same universal frame of nature, which through its continuous reference to the human mind acquires a basic uniformity.

But Eriugena's approach through division rather than definition entails still more consequences, markedly influencing his further investigation of nature. Since all of *natura* as well as the *Periphyseon*'s complete physiology are dependent on the resilience of the mind, the faculty of human reason is fully accredited with the investigation of being and non-being alike, these forming nature's constituent parts. In contrast to the act of definition, the principle of rationality here remains valid even when the powers of reason must be obviously defeated, such as when seeking to comprehend the divine essence. It is as if Eriugena, by purposely retreating behind the effective shield of his mind, becomes able to summon up enough strength to reach for what lies in fact beyond his sphere of influence.

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<sup>25</sup> The combination *rationabilis investigatio* can be found twice in the *Periphyseon*: *Per.* I 456B, Sh.-W.: 68; *Per.* III 713C, Sh.-W.: 240.

Whereas human reason does not succeed in demarcating the precise scope of *natura*, through a supreme effort it yet manages to overcome its own shortcomings by postulating a universal concept that literally stretches into infinity. It is reason's immeasurable range of influence encapsulated in Eriugena's notion of *natura*, which hereby proves to be the most outstanding trait of the *Periphyseon*'s first division. Through reason, which receives a concentrated and apparently unrestrained application in the act of division, Eriugena audaciously intends to examine the comprehensive totality of God and creation.

As yet it is not clear whether Eriugena's inventive approach to *natura*, found in outline in the *Periphyseon*'s prologue, will be entirely successful. But this should not burden our forthcoming study of this work's ideas over-much. Even if by chance Eriugena's methodology as applied in the rest of the *Periphyseon* should fail to demonstrate the same all-embracing quality which was significant for the description of its object of study (*natura*), it will at any rate supply the only means of verification as regards the proper execution of the task the author has imposed on himself. I therefore intend to return to the prologue's opening sentence more than once, in order to compare the outcome of Eriugena's speculations with the characteristics of their initial stage of development.

### 1.2. *The Second Division of Natura: Division and Return*

The division into being and non-being is definitely of major importance for the explication of *natura*, since it constitutes its central concept. But, despite its admittedly superior status, it is not the only division employed in the *Periphyseon*. After the Master and his Student have agreed upon the general name of *natura* for the unlimited multitude of all things that are and that are not, their dialogue continues in the following manner:

M. Thus, since we have agreed on this name as a general one, I should like you to give a reasonable indication of its division into species by means of distinctions; or, if you wish, I shall first try to give a division, while you judge whether it is correct.

S. I beg you to go ahead. For I am impatient and want to hear from you a true explanation of this matter.

M. It seems to me that the division of nature by four distinctions leads to four species; of these the first is into that which creates and is not created, the second into that which is created and creates, the third into that which is created and creates, and the fourth into that which neither creates nor is created. These four species consist of two pairs of opposites. For the third species is opposed to the first, while the fourth is opposed to the second; but the fourth is ranked among the impossibles, whose essence is that it cannot be. Does such a division seem right to you or not?

S. It is indeed right..... (*Per.* I 441A-442A, Sh.-W.: 36)

In this division *natura* functions as the all-embracing *genus*, which by means of four differences becomes classified into four species. The major dividing-line cutting through *natura* is the distinction between *creare* and *creari*, i.e. to create and to be created, equally bisecting all of nature's forms. The four species result from the combination of the attributes *creans* et *creata*, each of these being either affirmed or denied in the various modifications of *natura*. Due to the alternation of contrasting qualifications, -negative and positive modes of predication or active and passive verbal attributes-, the individual species of *natura* are intricately arranged so as to form two pairs of opposites. The first form of *natura creans et non creata* stands in diametrical opposition to the third of *natura creata et non creans*. In a like manner the second form of *natura creans et creata* has its counterpart in the fourth form of *natura non creans et non creata*. The fourth species stands somewhat apart from the preceding three, as Eriugena reckons it among the '*impossibilia*',<sup>26</sup> signifying thereby that it cannot exist in the form in which it is described.

By taking the basic difference between *natura creans* and *natura creata* as his point of departure in this fourfold division, Eriugena professes to be well in line with the general rules of Christian cosmology whereby the main distinction applied to the totality of things rests upon the biblical notions of *creator* and *creatura* placed in a causal and hierarchical order.<sup>27</sup> The world is nothing but an artefact made by God's hands. Yet Eriugena virtually neutralizes the sharp dichotomy between God and creation when he puts forth a combination of the active *creare* and the passive *creari* in all nature's individual forms, modifying these through either affirmation or denial. Whereas the original antithesis of God *versus* creation which ultimately boils down to the simple opposition between activity and receptivity, would have put all the argument's weight on the side of God, we now find before us a much more dynamic system of four analogous forms.<sup>28</sup> Within the whole complex of *natura*, the underlying distinction between God and creation, though not employed as such, is by no means overcome so as to suggest their latent equivalence. Eriugena indisputably maintains

<sup>26</sup> When undertaking the explanation of the fourth species in *Periphyseon* Book II, the Master refers again to the so-called *impossibilia*, explaining them as follows:

N. *Possibilia quoque et impossibilia in numero rerum computari nemo recte philosophantium contradicet; quae nulla alia ratione esse dicuntur nisi quia possibilia possunt in aliqua re fieri etsi non sint, impossibilia vero sola virtute impossibilitatis continentur. Eorum enim esse est impossibilitas in aliqua re intellectuali seu sensibili apparere -et possibulum quidem exemplum fiat: Quidam homo potest prolem gignere sed amore virginitalis detentus spernit prolem habere; impossibilium vero: Rationabile animal impossibile est irrationabile esse aut conversim-, de quibus quisquis plene voluerit percipere legat Periermenias hoc est De Interpretatione Aristotelem in qua aut de his solis, hoc est possibilibus et impossibilibus, aut maxime a philosopho disputatum est (Per. II 597B-C, Sh.-W.: 162).*

<sup>27</sup> See Sheldon-Williams 1967: 425-431.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Schrimpf 1982: 152-158.

this fundamental contrast in his second division as he did in the first, albeit in a veiled and qualified manner, and thus he opens up yet new perspectives for our interpretation and investigation of his concept of *natura*.

As to the specific objects indicated by the four species of nature, the Student has virtually no problems in understanding and identifying the first three, as they are thoroughly familiar through their Augustinian background.<sup>29</sup> The first form he correctly recognizes as pertinent to the cause of all things that are and that are not (*sic!*), that is God in his capacity as creator of the universe.<sup>30</sup> The second species refers to the primordial causes, which are identical with the reasons and essences of all created things encountered in the first division. On account of the Master's preceding description the third species belongs to the things that are known through coming into being in time and place, i.e. the spatio-temporal world.<sup>31</sup> But the fourth species, ranked by the Master under the heading of '*impossibilia*', puzzles the Student very much, as it appears to range beyond the scope of *natura* as he knows it (*sed multum me movet quarta species quae a te addita est*, *Per.* I 442A, Sh.-W.: 38). He expresses his need for a more detailed discussion of the individual forms. The Master presently returns to the first and foremost division of nature, introducing the various modes of interpretation of being and non-being. It is only after the explanation of these and a following discussion about the nature of the beatific vision and the notion of theophany, that he makes mention of the fourfold division again.<sup>32</sup> He elucidates the first form of *natura* as God who creates all things, but is not created himself as he is without beginning (*ἀναρχος*).<sup>33</sup> The remainder of Book I is largely devoted to a further discussion of God as the omnipotent cause of all things.

It is not until the beginning of Book II that the Master resumes his explanation of the fourfold division of *natura*.<sup>34</sup> After treating of the dia-

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *De civ. dei* V, 9: *Causa itaque rerum quae facit nec fit deus est; aliae vero causae et faciunt et fiunt, sicut sunt omnes creati spiritus maxime rationales; corporales autem causae quae magis fiunt quam faciunt non sunt inter causas efficientes enumerandae.*

<sup>30</sup> For the Dionysian background of this expression, see D.J. O'Meara 1981: 131.

<sup>31</sup> *Per.* I 442A-B, Sh.-W.: 38.

<sup>32</sup> *Per.* I 451C, Sh.-W.: 58: *N....Proinde ad ea quae proposita sunt, hoc est, ad divisiones naturae, redeundum esse censeo.*

<sup>33</sup> *Per.* I 451C, Sh.-W.: 58: *N. Praedictarum itaque naturae divisionum prima differentia nobis visa est in eam quae creat et non creatur. Nec immerito, quia talis naturae species de deo solo recte praedicatur, qui solus omnia creans ἀναρχος, hoc est sine principio, intelligitur esse, quia principalis causa omnium quae ex ipso et per ipsum facta sunt solus est, ac per hoc et omnium quae ex se sunt finis est; ipsum enim omnia appetunt. Est igitur principium et medium et finis: principium quidem, quia ex se sunt omnia quae essentiam participant; medium autem, quia in ipso et per ipsum subsistunt atque moventur; finis vero, quia ad ipsum moventur quietem motus sui suaeque perfectionis stabilitatem quaerentia. Cf. *Per.* I Sh.-W.: 227-228, n.61.*

<sup>34</sup> *Per.* II 523D-524D, Sh.-W.: 4: *N. Quoniam in superiore libro de universalis naturae universalis divisione ....breviter diximus, nunc eandem naturae divisionem latius, si videtur, repetamus.*

metrical oppositions mentioned before, he goes on to compare the individual species in order to evaluate their respective similarities and differences. The interconnection between the first and the fourth, which manifest a partial equality in that they are both uncreated forms, brings him to the introduction of a new element in the discussion. Before continuing the dialogue concerning the individual species, in particular the long awaited clarification of the fourth, the Master wants to broach the topic of the return of all things 'by that science which the philosophers call 'ἀναλυτική' (*Per.* II 526A, Sh.-W.: 6).<sup>35</sup> The Student agrees with his proposal and adds an apodeictic statement, claiming that there is in fact no rational division that cannot be brought back again by the same stages through which it has come into being. The process of return is therefore a necessary consequence of every division to the point of being an inherent aspect of it: division can only find its true purpose and fulfillment in the final return to its original cause. It will then arrive at the One who is inseparable in himself and who initially furnished the point of departure for its unwinding.<sup>36</sup> Thus the intriguing fourth species becomes implicitly identified as God, who previously marked also the beginning of this division.

Eriugena describes *analysis* as a philosophical science which is intrinsically pertinent to the process of division. While in the *Periphyseon* he merely contents himself with giving an etymological explanation,<sup>37</sup> he can be seen to go into considerably greater depth in the opening chapter of the *De praedestinatione*, commenting on division and analysis as branches of philosophy:

Because the way of every faithful and perfect doctrine, by which the reason of all things is most diligently sought and most clearly found, is established in that discipline commonly called philosophy by the Greeks, we concluded that it was necessary to comment briefly on its divisions or sections. For if it is, as Saint Augustine says, believed and taught, as the main point of human salvation, that philosophy, i.e. the study of wisdom, and religion are the same, to the extent that those whose doctrine we do not approve do not share our sacraments with us either, what then is the practice of philosophy other than laying down the rules of true religion, by which the highest and principal cause of all things, viz. God, is humbly honoured as well as ration-

<sup>35</sup> *Per.* II 525D-526A, Sh.-W.: 6: N. *Et quia de oppositionibus et similitudinibus deque differentiis est dictum, de earundem reditu atque collectione ea disciplina quam ἀναλυτικὴν φιλοσοφίη vocant breviter dicendum video.*

<sup>36</sup> *Per.* II 526A, Sh.-W.: 6: ...donec perveniatur ad illud unum inseparabiliter in se ipso manens ex quo ipsa divisio primordium sumpsit.

<sup>37</sup> *Per.* II 526B-C, Sh.-W.: 8: N. 'Αναλυτικὴ a verbo ἀναλύω derivatur, id est resolvo vel redeo;..... Est igitur reditus et resolutio individuorum in formas, formarum in genera, generum in οὐσίας, οὐσιῶν in sapientiam et prudentiam ex quibus omnis divisio oritur in eademque finitur.



ally investigated? It therefore follows that true philosophy is true religion and, conversely, that true religion is true philosophy. It is recognized that, while there can be a division on many sides and in various ways, yet religion and philosophy must twice have two principal parts necessary for solving every question. The Greeks preferred to call these parts διααιρετική, ὀριστική, ἀποδεικτική, ἀναλυτική, while we can call the same parts *divisoria*, *diffinitiva*, *demonstrativa* and *resolutiva* in Latin. Of these parts, the first dissects the one into many through division, the second collects the one from the many through definition, the third uncovers the hidden underneath the manifest through demonstration, and the fourth unravels the composite into simple parts through separation. (*De praed.* I,1).

Eriugena regards philosophy here as the proper manner whereby all pious and perfect doctrine can penetrate the rationale of all things. He consequently deems it necessary to deal with the philosophical divisions. Adopting an Augustinian tenet from the *De vera religione* he comes to equate philosophy with religion. But although he bases himself on Augustine, on closer inspection his position differs considerably from Augustine's. In the *De vera religione* Augustine, who in this context appears to be driven by pastoral motives, claims the identity of philosophy and religion as a principal need for human salvation. He criticizes contemporary philosophers for sharing the gods of the masses in collective worship, while at the same time spreading discord and confusion through the public propagation of contradictory views in their own philosophical schools. In contrast with this despicable attitude Augustine himself advocates the fundamental accordance between entertaining doctrinal viewpoints and engaging in religious ceremony.<sup>38</sup>

Placed in its original context, the Augustinian identity of philosophy (as the *studium sapientiae*) and religion is dictated by the absolute primacy of religion.<sup>39</sup> By religion Augustine means the Christian faith reified in the sacraments that will lead mankind eventually to a life of beatitude in God. Eriugena, although starting out from this familiar Augustinian comment, can be seen to develop quite another view on this issue. Philosophy and religion may very well share the same subject-matter, i.e. God as the

<sup>38</sup> *De ver. rel.* V, 8: ....religionem ab eis non esse quaerendam, qui eadem sacra suscipiebant cum populis et de suorum deorum natura ac summo bono, diversas contrariasque sententias in scholis suis, eadem teste multitudine, personabant. Quod si hoc unum tantum vitium Christiana disciplina sanatum videremus, ineffabili laude praedicandam esse, neminem negare oporteret. Haereses namque tam innumerabiles a regula Christianitatis aversae, testes sunt non admitti ad communicanda sacramenta eos qui de patre deo, et sapientia eius, et munere divino aliter sentiunt et hominibus persuadere conantur, quam veritas postulat. Sic enim creditur et docetur, quod est humanae salutis caput, non aliam esse philosophiam, id est sapientiae studium, et aliam religionem, cum hi quorum doctrinam non approbamus, nec sacramenta nobiscum communicant.

<sup>39</sup> See *De ver. rel.* I, 1: Cum omnis vitae bonae ac beatae via in vera religione sit constituta, qua unus Deus colitur, et purgatissima pietate cognoscitur principium naturarum omnium, a quo universitas et inchoatur et perficitur et continetur,....

cause of all things, but philosophy is assigned with the 'formal' side of the search for God, as it lays down the guidelines along which the investigation should take place. Eriugena's orientation appears to be at variance with Augustine especially in that the formal structure of philosophy comes to underly and thereby direct the attainment of its final goal: God. It is precisely this conviction that also prompted the author's curt comment in the earlier *Annotationes in Martianum Capellam* '*Nemo intrat in caelum nisi per philosophiam*' (Nobody can enter heaven except through philosophy) and thus contributed substantially to his reputation as a relentless rationalist.<sup>40</sup> Whether this conclusion is justified, it is as yet difficult to make out.

The final objective of philosophy and religion being the same, I want to draw attention to the fact that in this early work Eriugena transfers the methodological function of philosophy to religion by allowing the former discipline to regulate and control the road to God. It is against this background that one should interpret his corollary to the Augustinian premise. Starting from a similar position, he advocates the equivalence of religion and philosophy much more rigidly than Augustine, and he ultimately concludes that they are interchangeable, as if the logical inversion of Augustine's premise could thereby intensify its rational consistency (*Conficitur inde veram esse philosophiam veram religionem conversimque veram religionem esse veram philosophiam*, *De praed.* I, 1).

Being in itself a pluriform discipline, philosophy can be divided up in various manners. Yet in order to solve a question one requires at least four necessary parts, arranged in two sets of two.<sup>41</sup> In the following paragraph, with a variation on Boethius' technical term for the mathematical sciences, Eriugena refers to these parts as the so-called *quadrivium humanae ratiocinationis* (*De praed.* I, 2).<sup>42</sup> He states that this quadrivium functions as a useful and honourable instrument whereby to arrive at the truth, which is to be found in the discipline of dialectics.<sup>43</sup> In view of this statement it seems as if we may well equate Eriugena's concept of philosophy with dialectics, because it is ultimately a dialectical scheme which lies at the basis of his rational arguments. The four parts of which the discipline of dialectics consists are taken from the Greek; their Latin rendering is *divisoria*, *diffinitiva*, *demonstrativa* and *resolutiva*.<sup>44</sup> They form two analogously struc-

<sup>40</sup> *Annot. in Mart.* 57, 15, Lutz: 64.

<sup>41</sup> For the Greek background of this scheme, see Sheldon-Williams 1973: 3ff. Schrimpf 1982: 95.

<sup>42</sup> See Boethius, *De inst. arith.*, Proemium.

<sup>43</sup> *De praed.* I, 2: *His enim, tanquam utili quodam honestoque humanae ratiocinationis quadrivio, ad ipsam disputandi disciplinam, quae est veritas, omnis in ea eruditus perveniri non dubitat.*

<sup>44</sup> See *De praed.* I, 1; cf. Madec's commentary on p.6 lines 19-27. For further references, see Schrimpf 1982: 95.

tured pairs (division and resolution, definition and demonstration), the first term of each pair dealing with the movement from unity into multiplicity and the second restoring the multiple parts to a new state of unity. This dialectical quadrivium constitutes Eriugena's outlook on philosophy, and as such it is charged with mapping out the path to God, who is the mutual aim of both philosophy and religion.

I have quoted this passage so as to be able to see to what extent this dialectical quadrivium, the methodological preponderance of which makes the balance between philosophy and religion slant to the former's side, does exert influence on the *Periphyseon's* investigation. Returning from Eriugena's general standpoints on philosophy in the *De praedestinatione* to the *Periphyseon's* physiology, I think one will have obtained a clearer grasp of his approach to *natura*. Of the four forms of dialectic mentioned in his early work the *Periphyseon* knows the names of three, -division, definition and analysis-, but retains as operative principles in fact only two. The aspect of definition, which has been discussed before and which is described here as dealing with the movement from multiplicity into unity, is in the *Periphyseon* closely associated with the category of place and, whatever its special function may be, it thereby apparently has exhausted its function as an instrument for rational analysis. From the four principles enumerated in the *De praedestinatione* Eriugena employs in the rest of his works only the first and the last i.e. *divisio* and *analysis*. It is with regard to this dialectical pair, dealing with the movement from unity into multiplicity and vice versa, that we should now try to contemplate Eriugena's fourfold division of *natura*.

As has been made clear, Eriugena has given quite a dynamic reinterpretation of the traditional distinction between God and creation by presenting an interplay between *natura's* creative and created aspects.<sup>45</sup> However, by elucidating this quadruple division of *natura* in relation to the dialectically standardized reciprocity of *divisio* and *analysis*, it becomes apparent that this division should be seen essentially as the implementation of a logical development, unfolding the unity of the divine essence into the multiplicity of created *genera* and *species*, and subsequently returning to the One whence it originated. God seems to epitomize both the beginning and the end of the unfolding of *natura* as a process which advances through the logical stages of division and analysis.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> For the background of this fourfold division, see Stock 1980: 86-96. Stock points to possible influences from the *Categoriae Decem* and Bede's *De rerum natura*. Other but less likely views refer to the doctrine of syzygies, which Eriugena may have derived from Macrobius (Sheldon-Williams 1967: 520 n.4) and to Philo's division of numbers (Jeauneau 1987d: 367-368).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Schrimpf 1982: 157. On the second division he states: 'Die *divisio naturae* zerlegt also den Begriff für den Prozess, den die Wirklichkeit im Ganzen notwendig durchläuft,

With this in mind we will continue closely following the *Periphyseon*'s argument, because its author explicitly pursues the application of the notion of *analysis* to the fourfold division.<sup>47</sup> The first step of the Master's so-called recollection is to establish the underlying identity of the second and the third species of nature as well as of the first and the fourth. Eriugena thereby reintroduces the discrepancy between God and creation, of which the fourfold division was proven to be such an intriguing and original elaboration.<sup>48</sup> But he pushes things even further, when in a following step he manifestly subjugates this reasserted distinction between God and creation to the inclusive supereminence of God, undertaking what appears to be an act of ultimate concentration.

A daring statement concludes his treatment of the second division of universal nature, as it sweepingly rounds up its various stages:

M. But suppose you conjoin creation with its creator in such a manner that you understand that there is in creation nothing save him who alone truly is -for nothing outside him can truly be called essential, because all things that are through him, in as far as they are, are nothing else but the participation in him who alone subsists from and through himself,- you will not deny then that creator and creation are one?

S. I could not easily deny that. It seems to me to be altogether ridiculous to resist this conclusion.

M. Thus the universe which consists of God and creation, previously divided as it were into four forms, is now reduced again to an undivided one, being at the same time principle, cause and end. (*Per.* II 528B, Sh.-W.:12).

Here we can trace the final steps that bring the process of division to its absolute completion. Having previously returned to the antithesis of God and creation, the Master now proposes to bring creation back to God. God is the unsurpassable source of all being, to the extent that he alone truly is. All other forms of being are therefore derived from the divine being, which is their sole source of existence as they all participate in it. Thus the Master declares that under the divine aegis God and creation are essentially one, -a suggestion with which the Student cannot disagree without bringing ridicule upon himself. In what seems to be a new angle of approach, the Master again takes up the universal concept of *natura*, which embraces the entities of both God and creation latently manifest underneath the dynamic disguise of its four species, and subse-

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mit Hilfe des formalen Verfahrens der logischen Einteilung vollständig in die Begriffe jener Aspekte, unter denen allein dieser Prozess als ein jeweils anderer Ausdruck der Wirklichkeit im Ganzen zum Gegenstand einer wissenschaftlichen Aussage gemacht werden kann.'

<sup>47</sup> *Per.* II 526C, Sh.-W.: 8: N. *Quaternarum itaque praedictarum formarum binis in unum coeuntibus fiat analitica id est reductiva, collectio.*

<sup>48</sup> *Per.* II 527C, Sh.-W.: 10: N....*Num itaque vides quattuor formarum praedictarum duas quidem, primam videlicet et quartam, in creatorem, duas, secundam dico et tertiam, in creaturam recolletas?*

quently allows it to be entirely consumed by the overwhelming presence of the indivisible One. This unidentified One, circumscribed as the triple manifestation of principle, cause and end, cannot but be God. At the end of Eriugena's dialectical process of division, therefore, the stages of nature's development unaccountably disappear through their simultaneous return to God, leaving the second division shrouded in total darkness.

Where does this lead us with regard to the interpretation of the purpose and function of this fourfold division of *natura*, the ultimate significance of which seems to be the imminent dissolution and disappearance in God, who also provided the starting-point for its development? Starting off with the most extreme position that the author comes to hold in dealing with quadruple *natura*, one should first of all conclude that the whole division reveals an intrinsic design to return to and be resolved in God, because he is the final goal of nature's evolution. We can therefore legitimately interpret the individual species as four successive stages in a process of divine explication, since they originate in God as the beginning of all things and again lead to him as the end. Since there is nothing preceding God or superior to him so as to be responsible for the setting in motion of *natura*'s unfolding, the second division can indeed refer only to the explication of God's own being. God is described most appropriately as *ἀναρχος*.<sup>49</sup> Neither is there any principle that will still be in force or dispose of any demonstrable power of attraction after the whole of creation has been implicated in God, who has been subsequently identified as the highest end of all things as well. We should hence be aware that the dynamic reciprocity of oneness and multiplicity, of *natura*'s creative and created aspects manifests an implicit tendency to gravitate towards the divine essence, the principle, cause and end of all things. From the fact that all things are meant to be reduced to the omnipotent source of their derivative existence, we can infer that the purpose of this fourfold division is clearly no other than to channel *natura* through the process of its unfolding into multiplicity towards its final rest in the indivisible God.

Going one step backwards, we now retreat from the extreme unification of the universe with God to the preceding situation of its exemplified diversity. Once again we must realize that the astoundingly bold unification, suggested by the above-mentioned passage, relies upon the fact that the process of division is not properly completed until the stage of *analysis* has been reached. After all, the Student explicitly hints at this when he replies that he cannot resist his Master's *collectio*, which is but one of many translations of the Greek term *ἀνάλυσις*. In the *De praedestinatione* Eriugena had described *analysis* as the act of resolving the composites through

<sup>49</sup> See e.g. *Per.* I 451D, Sh.-W.: 58; *Per.* I 516A, Sh.-W.: 204.

separation into their simple elements. Applied to the fourfold division of *natura*, the principle of *analysis* realizes the return of all things to the One, i.e. God. Yet this cannot be God in his capacity of the unprecedented beginning, potentially containing within himself all of creation (*natura creans et non creata*). The phase of *analysis* clearly refers to the end of all rational division by focusing anew on the simple elements as they, having completed their course of development through multiplication, will eventually regain their original simplicity in the One, acquiring a more refined and elevated unity than whence they sprang. Therefore, the dialectical stage of *analysis* can only correspond with Eriugena's fourth form of *natura non creans et non creata*, which pertains to God as the end and ultimate resting-place of all things.

However, this last conclusion leads up to a remarkable contradiction in Eriugena's fourfold division. When all things are meant to be absorbed in God by means of the process called *analysis*, God can be seen to function not only as the all-embracing receptacle in which all things will eventually come to reside, but also as the absolute vanishing-point of the very process of division. In the final act of *analysis* all the foregoing stages of *natura*'s unfolding into multiplicity will not only be brought back into a state of complete harmony, but due to the homogeneity of this newly achieved unity the perspective on the previous differentiation of *natura* consisting of four interrelated species will be lost entirely. Thus in the final act of *analysis* nature's dialectical balance appears to be seriously disturbed, as the dominance of the fourth species obliterates the validity of the preceding fourfold system, through which Eriugena contemplated and divided the whole of *natura*.

The application of the dialectical scheme of division and analysis to the universal concept of *natura* appears to have wide-ranging consequences for the complete edifice of Eriugena's physiology. Actually putting into effect the fourth form discloses the occurrence of a dialectical impossibility, for it intrinsically denies the very existence of the division of which it yet forms a consistent and integrated part. In the reference to the One to whom all of nature must return through the necessary stage of *analysis*, both these aspects appear to be incorporated in quite a remarkable manner. On the one hand, by referring to this fourth form as the principle, cause and end of all things and thus conclusively implicating *natura* with the omnipotent source of its being, Eriugena intimates God's character as the all-embracing culmination of *natura*. Yet by describing the fourth species conversely as the indivisible One he undeniably alludes to its contradictory character as the absolute negation of nature's division.

It is against the background of *analysis*, that we should interpret the *Periphyseon*'s second division of nature. By *analysis* I mean the dialectical

process of reversal whereby nature with its multiple forms returns to its original unity. Its distinguishing feature is that it not only marks the end of Eriugena's rational division but ultimately denies its very existence, thereby affecting all areas of Eriugena's physiology. As yet the final coalescence of *creator* and *creatura* and consequently the reduction of the four forms of *natura* to the indivisible One is but a rhetorical artifice, sprouting forth from the Master's daring hypothesis reflected in the phrase: *Quid si*? It must still be exemplified in the course of Eriugena's investigation of *natura*. Yet whatever its specific consequences will turn out to be, the author's institution of the four species will at any rate give some indications. One of these is undoubtedly that the fourfold division manifestly expresses Eriugena's intention to accomplish the final reunion of the universe with God on the exclusive basis of a dialectical process, of which *divisio* and *analysis* are necessary parts.

From Eriugena's remarks about *analysis* it appears that God as the objective of nature's development, portrayed in his capacity of principle, cause and end of all things, does not reveal the same qualities as the traditional almighty founder of creation. This state of affairs is illustrated by the changing position of the divine in the fourfold scheme, in which both the first and the fourth form pertain to God. Thus we are led to the conclusion that the structure of Eriugena's quadruple division of the species of *natura* does more than merely reflect the underlying character of its objects. On closer inspection it appears that this structure can only be understood when seen as commensurate with the thrust that is inherent in what seems to be its self-reliant dialectical framework. Therefore we can evaluate the true purport of this second division of *natura* only when we are fully aware of the dialectical perspective that governs Eriugena's outlook on the objects of his rational investigation.

This point leaves us now with at least one unsolved problem, which was definitely recognized by the author himself. In nature's second division the fourth species of *natura non creans et non creata* as yet continues to stand out as a dialectical contradiction in terms.<sup>50</sup> As such it will require more attention as we follow the course of Eriugena's physiology.

### 1.3. *The Relation Between the First and the Second Division. A Closing Comparison*

It has been shown that the first division of nature into things that are and things that are not derives from the distinction between things that can be grasped by the mind and things that exceed the mind's grasp. Given the prologue's character as an act of reflection, I would like to ana-

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<sup>50</sup> *Per.* I 442A, Sh.-W.: 36: ...sed quarta inter impossibilia ponitur cuius esse est non posse esse.

lyze Eriugena's approach here as his application of the principle of rationality, because he uses reason as his fundamental tool for the investigation of *natura*.<sup>51</sup>

In the first and foremost division of nature Eriugena shows the intention to make the human mind explicitly responsible for the division into being and non-being. He relies unremittingly on the mind in order to judge what belongs to the realm of being -when things comply with man's mental facilities, and what belongs to the realm of non-being -when things transcend the powers of the mind. By becoming the inclusive term for things that are and things that are not, *natura* has found its organizing principle in the human mind, for one can approach the spheres of being and non-being only with the conscious awareness of undertaking a rational enterprise. This organizing principle is at the same time a constitutive one, for only through the mind can we conceive of the general concept of *natura* at all. Eriugena's employment of the principle of rationality bears on the inauguration of the very notion of *natura* as an all-embracing whole as much as on its universal division. It is therefore undoubtedly the most outstanding feature of Eriugena's first division of nature. As such it also sets the tone for the ensuing dialogue, which, however wide-ranging its speculations, ultimately refers back to this original starting-point.

God is included in Eriugena's universal concept of *natura*,<sup>52</sup> to the extent that he seems to hold the position of non-being as if it were exclusively reserved for him. Eriugena's interpretation of non-being reveals God's ontological transcendence, the epithet *per excellentiam suae naturae* being awarded on the exclusive basis of God's defiance of the mind's grasp.<sup>53</sup> Retroactively, however, the apparent defeat of human reason actually reinforces the strength of Eriugena's choice purposely to trust to the mind's scrutinizing capacity. By relying on the human mind as an effec-

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Schrimpf 1982: 97. Schrimpf introduces the expression »Einführung des Prinzips der wissenschaftlichen Vernünftigkeit« in the course of explaining Eriugena's commitment to the discipline of logic, how it becomes stronger as he develops his ideas in the *Annot. in Mart.*, the *De praed.* and the *Per.* For various reasons Schrimpf prefers this description to the older »Prinzip und Postulat der Rationalität« which he considers to be too closely associated with scholastic philosophy. However that may be, by using the expression 'principle of rationality' here I only want to refer to the function of human reason as the basic distinguishing factor in the whole of *natura*, refraining from further judgements about the nature of Eriugena's rational thinking.

<sup>52</sup> On this point Eriugena remains loyal to the all-embracing sense of this term in Boethius' *Contra Eut.*, ch.1. According to Boethius the third way of predicating nature pertains to *omnes res quae quocumque modo esse dicuntur*. He further clarifies the predication of '*natura*' by stating: *natura est earum quae, cum sint, quoquo modo* (in a measure i.e. through the removal of accidents) *intellectu capi possunt*, so as positively to include God and matter in it. On Eriugena's reshaping of elements from Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius in order to arrive at his own understanding of *natura*, see D.J. O'Meara 1981: 126-133.

<sup>53</sup> For the Dionysian background of this expression, see D.J. O'Meara 1981: 131-133.



tive criterion in the approach to *natura*, in the demarcation of its outline<sup>54</sup> as well as in its division, he not only establishes an unbreakable interrelation between being and non-being, but he also achieves their ultimate integration by implicitly postulating the latter's constant reference to the former.

In this particular manner Eriugena cannot avoid eventually touching on God's superior state (which is indicated by the term of non-being), although he is not able to grasp it completely. But the continuous efforts of the human mind to reach outside of itself will at any rate result in the expansion of its natural boundaries. And what is yet more important, Eriugena will thereby indirectly acquire a better knowledge of the whole of *natura*, which includes God whose nature can never be completely known. Therefore, although the author's application of the principle of rationality can validly be seen as sharpening the mind's outlook on its specific sphere of influence, i.e. creation, I think we should regard his procedure primarily as an intricate attempt to guarantee the fundamental accessibility of *natura* as an unlimited whole. As a side-effect Eriugena's approach also enhances man's specific awareness of the complicated position of God, since it elicits a better understanding of both his comprehensibility and his incomprehensibility. In the next chapter more attention will be given to this last issue.<sup>55</sup>

The fourfold division seems to reflect an equally close connection between the author's approach and the presentation of his actual subject-matter. Like the first division this scheme also introduces *natura* as a universal concept, in the guise here of a dynamic interplay between creative and created aspects underneath which, however, we can still recognize the static dichotomy of God *versus* creation. As we have seen in Book I and especially at the beginning of Book II of the *Periphyseon* these different stages are completely bound up with the dialectical process of *divisio* and *analysis*, which characterizes the multiplicative movement of all things deriving from God, and their final reduction to the divine simplicity. God

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<sup>54</sup> By this 'demarcation of its outline' I want to refer to Eriugena's decision to refrain from definition, as a category which would imply nature's finite character. Thus I hint at his implied intention to let nature stretch into infinity. Yet it is important to notice that 'infinity' in the case of Eriugena does not undermine the complete structure of the universe, inasmuch as it remains undisputably clear that *natura* ultimately consists of God and creation. Therefore, in my view we are not dealing here with a case of absolute infinity. Even 'infinity' as a proper divine name reveals a tentative character, cf. *Per.* I 517B, Sh.-W.: 206: *Fatetur [sc. fides catholica et vera ratio] enim deum infinitum esse plusque quam infinitum (infinitas enim infinitorum est)....*In order to understand the sequence of arguments now following one should pay close attention to this 'limitative' character of nature's infinity.

<sup>55</sup> For the issue of God's incomprehensibility, see the discussion of the problem of negative theology, ch. 2.1. For the issue of God's comprehensibility, see ch. 2.3. on theophany.

marks both the beginning and the end of this process of creation, thereby implicitly reducing the role of creation to a transitory interlude, merely intended to bring out the process of divine explication and set it in relief by delineating the various stages of its development.

In view of the divine dominance in this fourfold scheme, we have attempted to illustrate how, for Eriugena, the stages of division and analysis represent a dialectical method of fundamental importance for any approach to God. In Eriugena's view, as expressed in the *De praedestinatione*, true philosophy and true religion are interchangeable, as they essentially aim at attaining the same goal *viz.* God. But, in the approach to God, Eriugena assigns to philosophy the specific role of laying down the rules in accordance with which the inquiry will be carried out. By burdening philosophy with this task of authorized supervision Eriugena seems to accredit it with some preponderance over religion in the sense that it promulgates his methodology. Only when making use of the four different stages of philosophy (of which, however, in the *Periphyseon* as in most of his other writings only the art of division and the art of analysis are retained),<sup>56</sup> can one gain a clear vision of the return of all things as the final preliminary stage before the immediate contemplation of God. Taking into account that for Eriugena philosophy coincides with dialectics, we can thus legitimately conclude that the predominance of philosophy necessarily involves the methodological implementation of the dialectical principles of division and analysis. With regard to Eriugena's physiology in the *Periphyseon* these branches of division and analysis reflect exactly the same methodological connotations as in the author's earlier work, thereby forming the very basis of the quadruple division of *natura*. The second division of nature, therefore, is no more than a variation on and elaboration of the dialectical notions of *divisio* and *analysis*, which are indispensable prerequisites in every search concerning God as the ultimate aim of both philosophy and theology.

God is in fact the ultimate 'rationale' of all things, providing not only the final aim of every dialectical inquiry, but also its actual subject-matter. As such he forms the substratum of the fourfold division of nature. In this

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Eriugena's preface to Maximus' *Ambig.* where he summarizes the movement of division and analysis, acknowledging his great debt to Maximus for furthering the understanding of specific theological tenets which had remained unclear after his reading of Pseudo-Dionysius: *...qualis sit processio, id est multiplicatio divinae bonitatis per omnia, quae sunt, a summo usque deorsum, ... Et iterum, ejusdem, divinae videlicet, bonitatis qualis sit reversio, congregatio per eosdem gradus ab infinita eorum, quae sunt, variaque multiplicatione usque ad simplicissimam omnium unitatem, quae in Deo est et Deus est; ita ut et Deus omnia sit, et omnia Deus sint. Et quomodo praedicta quidem divina in omnia processio ἀνάλυσις dicitur, hoc est resolutio, reversio vero θέωσις, hoc est deificatio* (PL 122, 1195B-1196A). Note how procession is indicated here by the name of *analysis* as opposed to *theosis* or return to the divine.

fourfold division *natura* is no more than the name of a composite whole, consisting of four different species which are classified according to the various combinations of its creative and created aspects. Although creation is very much a part of this scheme, the fourfold division becomes eventually wrapped up in God. Through a process of final integration *natura*'s intermediate status will inevitably lead to the complete absorption of creation by God. Although Eriugena does not posit the actual fulfillment of this final unification until the last dialectical stage of *analysis*, it is nonetheless evident that the whole fourfold division is intrinsically indicative of its nearing dissolution in God. Creation, therefore, apparently serves the purpose of functioning as a necessary medium to accentuate the contrast between God as the beginning of all things and God as the end respectively. Thus it implicitly emphasizes the enormous potential of this dialectical study of nature.

The first division of *natura* into being and non-being may be compared with the second division into four species particularly in view of the relatedness of their approaches. The dialectical scheme to which Eriugena committed himself in the *De praedestinatione* has come to bear on his physiology as well. Retaining the basic distinction between *creator* and *creatura*, he yet sets in motion a new process of dynamic reciprocity between oneness and multiplicity, guided by the power inherent in the logical stages of *divisio* and *analysis*. As in the first division of *natura*, which hinges on the applied principle of rationality, we here encounter a remarkable confidence in man's reasoning faculty. In this fourfold division the dialectical scheme that lies at the basis of all human reasoning becomes the point of departure for yet another division of, i.e. rational outlook on, universal nature.

As has been pointed out, in this second division Eriugena renders a logical operation with formal partitions in terms deriving from and familiar to Christian theology. Yet his description of the dialectical process as well as his manipulative treatment of God and creation as extremes in a causal and hierarchical relationship leave us no doubt as to his real intentions. It is obvious that Eriugena endeavours to restore *natura* to its original undivided unity in God, after the serene balance of its resting in the divine essence had been vigorously disturbed by the actual unfolding of creation.<sup>57</sup> Only in the stage of *analysis* can the process of division attain its proper completion. In this final *analysis* Eriugena thus attempts to restore creation to God, not so much relinquishing as sublimating it in an exalted and all-inclusive view of God. It is likely that the divine omnipotence may still not be completely understood by the human mind, but it is at least

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<sup>57</sup> See especially *Per.* II 528B, Sh.-W.: 12, quoted above in ch. 1.2.

structurally reflected in and mapped out by Eriugena's dialectical approach.

In the beginning of Book II of the *Periphyseon* there are several remarks which support and corroborate our earlier conclusion pertaining to the stringent methodological framework as a dominant characteristic in both the fourfold division of *natura* into species and in the twofold division into being and non-being. Moreover, these remarks may confirm the hypothesis that in both cases it is a strictly rational methodology that governs the author's outlook on and investigation of *natura*. Although the division into being and non-being is ranked as the highest of the two (*prima summaque*), the fourfold division receives eminent descriptions as well. It is labelled as the universal division of universal nature, directly vying with the first division in that it also seems to have an unrestricted range of application.

Eriugena explicitly refuses to simplify the relationship between God and creation, which form nature's constituents, into that between a whole and its parts, despite God's undisputed superiority. The actual discrepancy between God and creation at last seems to be overcome, if not completely effaced, in the universal and rational concept of *natura*, the division of which is interpreted as *intelligibilis quaedam universitatis contemplatio*.<sup>58</sup> In one of his additions to the text of the *Periphyseon* found in ms. R (Rheims 875) the author is most radical when he restricts the validity of this division to its exclusive methodological importance:

We therefore say that universal nature has forms, because our intelligence is somehow formed by it, while attempting to deal with it; for being in its own right universal nature does not everywhere admit of forms. (*Per.* II 525B, Sh.-W.: 6)<sup>59</sup>

One evidently needs to discern between the various forms of *natura* for intelligence's sake only. The four forms are not material to the all-embracing concept of *natura* itself, but they render useful assistance in our contemplation of it, because through their intelligible nature they communicate that which in itself transcends the plurality of such forms. Eriugena's supposition or postulation of forms turns out to function as a basic requirement for expounding the concept of *natura* to the human mind. In this respect it comes close to the first division of nature with its employment of the explicit principle of rationality for the structuring of its concept.

Therefore, we may state by way of summary that both divisions con-

<sup>58</sup> *Per.* II 523D-524D, Sh.-W.: 4: *Quoniam in superiore libro de universalis naturae universalis divisione non quasi generis in formas seu totius in partes .... sed intelligibili quadam universitatis contemplatione -universitatem dico deum et creaturam- breviter diximus,...*

<sup>59</sup> In *Per.* II 525C, Sh.-W.: 6, the passage continues as follows: *Eam siquidem deo et creatura contineri non incongrue dicimus, ac per hoc in quantum creatrix est nullam formam accipit in se ipsa, formatae vero a se naturae multiformitatem praestat.*

siderably facilitate Eriugena's approach to the notion of *natura*, the epistemological complexity of which is largely due to the incorporation of creation with God in a uniform but undefined whole. The character of rationality which was such a significant feature in Eriugena's first division of nature proves to be equally prominent in the second division into four forms, making the process of nature's unfolding traceable by the human mind. Although in the fourfold division there is no explicit principle of rationality that establishes the concept of nature by discerning between being and non-being, the dialectical scheme of *divisio* and *analysis* nevertheless ascends to a position of commensurable efficacy from the point of view of human understanding, providing Eriugena with a firm starting-point for his reinterpretation of the dichotomy that separates God and creation.

The fact that the author gives absolute priority to a dialectical procedure in arranging his subject-matter, thus emphasizing the ultimately rational character of nature as his object of analysis, can be further illustrated by his description of the relationship between God and creation in terms of immediate causation. Eriugena interprets the unfolding process of creation as a logical chain of cause and effect, on the one hand endorsing its character of necessity while on the other hand vouchsafing some intelligible distinctions between the various forms of nature. When the Master and his Student discuss the two pairs of opposites of which the fourfold division of nature consists, they align the first and fourth form, since they both share the epithet *non creata* and as such pertain exclusively to God. Next they also coordinate the second and the third form, which are both denoted as *natura creata* and therefore belong to the realm of creation.<sup>60</sup>

Yet there is no complete analogy between these pairs, for the Student views the unity and the difference between the second and the third form much more clearly than that between the first and the fourth, due to the fact that in his opinion the dividing-line cutting through the former pair (*creans* in the second *versus non creans* in the third form) is reflected in reality as well as in our mental perception:

But the other two forms, I mean the second and the third, not only come into being in our contemplation, but are also found in the very nature of created things, in which causes are separated from their effects and effects are united with their causes because they are all one in the same genus, that is in created nature. (*Per.* II 528A, Sh.-W.: 12)<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Per.* II 526C-527C, Sh.-W.: 8-10. In 527C the Master concludes: *Num itaque vides quattuor formarum praedictarum duas quidem, primam videlicet et quartam, in creatorem, duas, secundam dico et tertiam, in creaturam recollectas?*

<sup>61</sup> This passage reflects Eriugena's additions to the text of ms. Rheims 875 in hand C, his supposed autograph.

Given the firmly established intelligible character of the four forms of nature, the chain of cause and effect that illuminates the Student's comprehension of the relation between the second and the third form strikes one as a concession granted by the Master so as to comply with the limitations of human insight. In order to facilitate the understanding of the intelligible forms, the Master endows them with an external shape in an attempt to visualize their connection. But their final arrangement is still exactly the same, in the sense that the causes get separated from the effects for the sole purpose of preparing for their future unification.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, whatever Eriugena's meaning with the introduction of the scheme of causation may be, it is ultimately only an accessory device to clarify the dialectical process of division and return. Rather than being an inherent facet of the fourfold scheme of nature, the causal scheme functions as an exemplary visualization of it.

In the end the causal distinctions will have to be retracted altogether. For they are ultimately subordinate to the rules of dialectical reasoning, the dynamic upswing of which prohibits our dwelling on one of the four explicatory levels of *natura*. We find the Master making the following statement to this effect:

For the procession of the creatures and their return coincide so much for the mind that investigates them that they seem to be inseparable the one from the other, and no one can explain anything worthy or valid about the one in itself without inserting the other, that is to say, about procession without return and collection, and conversely. (*Per.* II 529A, Sh.-W.: 14)<sup>63</sup>

In the end only human reason can effectively contribute to the progress of the investigation of *natura*. Although it has to operate on the verge of complete confusion, it is the sole faculty capable of perceiving the slight distinctions of perspective, the subtle shifts of emphasis brought about by the explication and subsequent return of nature, which follow the rules of dialectic and aim at the final attainment of God.

In accordance with this passage I think that the fourfold division, which is based on Eriugena's effective usage of dialectical reasoning, should be ultimately interpreted not as a causal scheme but rather as a faithful

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<sup>62</sup> The Master does not answer the suggestion of his pupil that the difference between the second and the third form is found in reality as well as in our contemplation thereof. His abrupt transition to the audacious rhetorical unification of all four forms in the one indivisible divine essence may prove that he is not interested in such factual differences, as he has set his mind on attempting to restore all forms to the divine harmony. This clearly expressed direction of his thought endorses the view that in the *Periphyseon* causal relationships are of secondary importance.

<sup>63</sup> Again we are dealing with an autographical addition to ms. Rheims 875. See above n. 61.

reflection of the author's implementation of dialectics in order to expose all sides of *natura*'s complicated course of development. The dialectical framework of this investigation, the regulating function of division and analysis, has induced him to recalibrate and revalue the distinction between *creator* and *creatura*, and present it in the intricate form of a double pair of opposites, the multidimensional intelligibility of which but faintly reverberates in the linear process of causation.

Because of the absolute predominance of dialectical method over factual subject-matter in Eriugena's approach to nature, which is indicative of the crucial role of human reason, the division of nature into four species reveals a close connection with the earlier twofold division into being and non-being.<sup>64</sup> In the fourfold division we can see how the human mind supplies compelling dialectical directives. Their function bears a close resemblance to that of beacons, through the tentative guidance of which Eriugena's inquiry should be able to steer a prudent course so as to bring *natura* back to its origin and fulfillment in God. As to the twofold division, it has unmistakably the author's preference over the fourfold division, the reason presumably being its indissoluble bond with the fundamental assessment of *natura*, of which it forms the constituent basis. It is through the explicit application of the principle of rationality that Eriugena finds a firm starting-point for his approach to universal reality, articulated through the distinction between things that can be grasped by the mind and things that transcend its grasp. Therefore, in Eriugena's view, to be grasped by the mind has become the very premise of being, while to transcend the mind's grasp serves as the premise of non-being, receiving the additional qualification of *per excellentiam suae naturae* with ultimate reference to God only. Although the fourfold division seems to be less persuasive it seems that in it this rational undertone is equally present; after all, it deals with intelligible forms for the purpose of structuring our mental grasp of reality, not reality (meaning *omnes res*) itself.<sup>65</sup>

However, there are considerable differences to be noted, giving each of the divisions of nature a very special and individual role. For example, it is only in the first division that this typical principle of rationality functions as the instance whereby Eriugena constitutes and thereby implements his ontology.<sup>66</sup> He confers the predicate of being solely upon

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<sup>64</sup> On the issue of the relation between the two divisions of nature, see Schrimpf 1982: 149-174.

<sup>65</sup> Schrimpf 1982: 146 detects an important distinction between Eriugena's logical approach and the encyclopedic principle of other Carolingian works with a comparable wide-ranging scope, such as Ps. Melito's *Clavis scripturae* and Hrabanus Maurus' *De universo*.

<sup>66</sup> By ontology I refer to the complete body of Eriugena's reflections on the problem of being i.e. ontic existence. Eriugena expresses his ontological views by indiscriminately using the terms of being and non-being, which has given rise to considerable confusion.

things that can be grasped by the mind. Thus he deliberately shuts God out of the realm of being, although he integrates him in the larger but undefined scope of *natura*. The predication of non-being appears to be the only appropriate figure of speech aptly to represent God's transcendence with regard to creation without compromising it. Eriugena manifestly rebuts any other interpretation of *non esse*. Moreover, he intensifies his usage of the predication of being and non-being in a most poignant way, not so much locating it in the vast extensiveness of universal nature, but rather tying it up with the limited cognitive power of the human mind. Thus he is justified in inaugurating his examination of *natura* as a rational investigation (*rationabilis investigatio: sic!*), the introduction of its subject-matter being utterly dominated by the human mind as the stronghold from which the whole of *natura* can be surveyed. Even non-being, which cannot be grasped by the human mind, is ultimately 'defined' -albeit in a negative way- in terms set by this same mind.

It is by focusing on the things that can be comprehended that Eriugena first of all contrives to get a firm grasp of being, while at the same time establishing the perspective for any future approach to non-being on the basis of his interpretation of being. Accordingly, by viewing non-being more or less as a reverse offshoot of being he expands this realm of *non esse* beyond the finite boundaries of creation. He thereby accentuates the superiority and transcendence of God, for the divine essence belongs exclusively in the realm of non-being. Although the mind's grasp can be superseded, Eriugena nevertheless relies consciously on its limited powers. He even manages to incorporate the sphere of non-being into his first division of *natura*, the scope of which thus seems equally to extend to infinite bounds. In the rest of the *Periphyseon* the author barely returns to this division of being and non-being in connection with what can be understood by the human mind and what is beyond the mind's powers at all. Still the opening sentence of the *Periphyseon* definitely sets the pattern for the author, as he continues his *discours* throughout the remainder of the text revealing time and again the same dynamic way of reasoning. The wide-ranging and seemingly infinite scope of *natura* rests firmly on Eriugena's uncompromising application of the principle of rationality as an epistemological starting-point for his inquiry into nature. It divides being and non-being, it represents the permanent awareness that an appropriate treatment is needed for both sections, and it continues to safeguard the progress and the consistency of the investigation into nature.

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However, in my view Eriugena never denies the existence of either God and creation anywhere in the *Periphyseon*. His predication of *non esse* should therefore not be seen as a philosophical problem, introducing some sort of radical negative ontology, but rather as a problem of language. I want to further elucidate this point below, ch. 2 Introduction.



It has been demonstrated before that the principle of rationality is equally dominant, albeit in a somewhat different way, in Eriugena's fourfold division of nature. Here it does not bring about a dichotomy between being and non-being, but is applied to the causal relationship between *creator* and *creatura*. It transforms this static difference into two pairs of opposites, structured and propelled by the inherent dialectical movement of division and analysis. Eriugena adopted a Greek dialectical framework and reshaped it for the purpose of making it compatible with the distinction between *creator* and *creatura*. Thus he develops the forms of *natura creans et non creata*, *natura creans et creata*, *natura non creans et creata*, *natura non creans et non creata*. As in the twofold division, the dialectical character of this fourfold division stretches and expands the scope of *natura* by blurring the traditional distinction that separated God and creation as subject and object and instead encloses them both in a new dynamic revolving system.

This fourfold division starts out from God and will eventually come to rest in God, the intermediate stages of created nature being sandwiched, as it were, between two manifestations of God *viz.* as the unprecedented beginning of all things and as the end to whom all things aspire. Thus we can in fact assemble all four modes of nature into an array of consecutive stages which at root expresses but a single development, namely that through which God unfolds himself in his creation. The dialectical process of division and analysis leads ultimately to the final unification of creation with God, whom Eriugena, as Augustine did before him, has professed to be the subject of both true religion and true philosophy.

In this logical process the stages of *divisio* and *analysis* work together inseparably, to the effect that the process of division is completed only after the return of all things to God in the stage of *analysis*. Consequently, the weight of Eriugena's reasoning shifts to the point of arrival at this final state of *natura non creata et non creans*, when all of creation will have been led back to God in such a manner that there is no distinction whatsoever left separating cause and effect. As might be expected, the road to this final state of *analysis* is a dialectical one. Its ultimate control lies in the hands of reason, which is responsible for both the execution and the completion of the development of this fourfold division.

Therefore, all through the *Periphyseon* this division, rather than the first, will form the background to, or more specifically the frame of orientation of, all Eriugena's speculations. The four successive modes can be seen to provide different platforms for the discussion of countless topics, ranging from the preserved possibility of a beatific vision for the angels to the sexual division inflicted on mankind as a punishment for Adam's sin in paradise. The fourfold division furnishes as it were the ground-plan for Eriugena's presentation of his speculative ideas in the *Periphyseon*: Book I

deals with God as the cause of all things, Book II with the primordial causes, Book III with created nature manifest in place and time, and Books IV and V, while starting out with the creation of man, broadly concentrate on the return of all things to God.

There is one last point to which I would like to draw attention. Because we attributed explicit epistemological primacy to the first division into being and non-being and have described the fourfold division into species as supplying the *Periphyseon*'s specific subject-matter, the impression may arise that the difference between the twofold and the fourfold division coincides with an assumed difference between subjectivity and objectivity. Various accounts of the relationship between the two divisions employed by the author seem to tend towards interpretations of this sort. I would here like overtly to contradict any such misrepresentation of the text by connecting the twofold and the fourfold division as closely as possible, ranking them on the same level of dialectical reasoning. It may then be said that the first division of nature, while taking its point of departure from the effectiveness of the human mind, leads to an ontological scheme valid for all of *natura*. On the other hand, although the fourfold division is rooted in the causal distinction between *creator* and *creatura*, it is still moulded into the very modes that are inherent in every dialectical search for the truth, both in religion and in philosophy. Therefore, instead of designating the difference between these divisions in terms of subjectivity or objectivity,<sup>67</sup> we should highlight the close relationship between ontology and intelligibility which is apparent both in the twofold and the fourfold division of *natura*. Ontology and intelligibility completely presuppose and condition each other in Eriugena's rational investigation of nature. This being the case, the next chapter will set out to throw more light on their connection against the background of Eriugena's general scrutiny of nature.

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<sup>67</sup> D.J. O'Meara 1981; Schrimpf 1982 may give rise to such ideas, which had been expressed by scholars before, see Huber 1861; Gilson [1944] 1986: 201-221.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CREATION AND GOD. AN EXPLANATION OF MAJOR THEMES IN ERIUGENA'S THINKING

#### *Introduction*

#### *A. Ontology and Intelligibility*

Whatever the particular relationship between the first and the second division may be, there is at any rate in both schemes a fundamental congruity between modes of being and modes of thought. I want to postulate this basic accordance between being and rational understanding as a significant characteristic that permeates all Eriugena's reflections. Being and being understood by the human intellect are closely interrelated. In fact, it is hard to distinguish between them at all, so completely do they predispose and condition each other. Only what is can be represented accurately in thought, and conversely, what can be thought necessarily possesses some sort of being. Pursuing this line of thought and extending it to the level of consequent application, as Eriugena does in the *Periphyseon*, one must conclude that the complete reciprocity of ontology and intelligibility is a significant feature of this work.<sup>1</sup> Whatever procedure the author follows in presenting his material, it is certainly true that in his approach the structure of being is always compatible with the structure of human reasoning. To put it rather sharply: there is ultimately no mode of being that does not yield to the tenacious grasp of the human intellect. In what follows we will try to reveal the actual purport of this programmatic statement about Eriugena's thought.

The natural correspondence of being and rational understanding in the *Periphyseon*'s two divisions of nature has received its most pointed expression in their application at the level of systematic dialectical argumentation. This phenomenon was already given attention before. Based on Eriugena's own insights and framed in his own words, the two divisions

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<sup>1</sup> Although in the second division of nature the relationship between *esse* and *comprehendi* is not explicitly employed, it is nevertheless present here as well. The second division is a rational model, because in it the four forms of *natura* ultimately coincide with their modes of appearance to the rational mind. Though primarily a rational model, this division still affects the underlying being of God and creation, to the extent that these can only be properly, albeit defectively, understood through the mediation of such dialectical forms. Cf. *Per.* II 523D-529B, Sh.-W.: 4-14.

of nature illustrate most clearly what is implied by the specific connotations of this bond between being and understanding, which must undoubtedly pervade the further unravelling of Eriugena's philosophy in a more or less systematic manner. However, given the basic relationship between *esse* and *comprehendi*, the two divisions can still be seen each to shine their own light on this state of affairs, as has already been indicated in the previous chapter. Let us for a moment dwell on the individual characteristics of both.

In the first division we have encountered Eriugena's confident appeal to the effectiveness of the human mind as the key-principle by means of which he simultaneously establishes and analyzes *natura* as the general name of all things that are and that are not. In addition to this I now wish to suggest that, in the larger context of the author's metaphysics, this implies that his avowed principle of rationality is instituted specifically for the purpose of determining the ultimate frame of reference for the author's ontology. Eriugena sacrifices the possibility of getting a complete grasp of nature's infinity, of which the divine infinity forms but a part, yet he tries to express it at the same time, never casting a shade of doubt on the ontic existence of this all-embracing concept.<sup>2</sup> We will comment further on this below. Thus far, we must conclude that it is without doubt a remarkable model of ontology which is employed by the author.<sup>3</sup> For, in constituting his ontology, non-being appears to be fully integrated with being through the medium of a fixed contrast, as they merely reveal the 'positive' and the 'negative' direction of the mind's thought as alternatives at its disposal.<sup>4</sup> As was previously established, being coincides with what can be understood by the mind, whereas non-being represents what transcends the mind's grasp, the mind thus forming the indispensable and exclusive criterion by which to distinguish between these opposite qualifications. Although being and non-being hold dominant positions in the first division of nature, the traditional distinction between God and creation is not completely blotted out. It re-emerges in the first mode of interpretation, although it is not openly mentioned there. On the whole it

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between being and non-being does not affect the existence of the universe. Thus one can speak of the first division as an ontological one.

<sup>3</sup> I have already pointed out (above, ch. 1.1.) that Eriugena's negative predications while pertaining to a denial of God's *esse* do not reflect doubt of the reality of the divine existence. See also Allard 1982.

<sup>4</sup> As I will attempt to illustrate below (ch. 2.1), the division of being and non-being can be much more satisfactorily explained in terms of kataphatic and apophatic theology than in terms of positive *versus* negative ontology. Eriugena points in this direction in his preface to the *Versio Dionysii* (PL 122, 1035A-1036A): *Quartus [sc. liber] de mystica theologia, qui, quantum ceteris est coartior in sermonibus, tantum largior in sensibus. Unde et in duas maximas logicae disciplinae dividitur partes, cataphaticam plane et apophaticam, id est in esse et non esse...*

seems to play a role of secondary importance, as its function merely consists in underlining the breadth of *natura's* scope.

In the second division of nature Eriugena's recourse to his reasoning faculty cannot be traced so easily, because we are nowhere confronted with an outward display of reason's formidable contribution to nature's development. In contrast with the first division, or perhaps to complement it, the traditional distinction between *creator* and *creatura* has not been replaced; in fact it is even presupposed as the obvious scheme underlying the author's quadruple presentation of *natura*. It looks as if Eriugena wants to bring out now what has been left virtually untouched in the first division. But, however prominent the position of the complementary pair *creator* and *creatura* in the description of the fourfold division may be, these entities reveal only the well-known underlying identity of nature's four forms. The most outstanding feature in this division is the combination of creative and created aspects in single species, and the remarkable arrangement of these in oppositional pairs on the basis of their differences. The divulgence of the underlying entities merely serves the subordinate purpose of clarification, while it does not enrich the actual understanding of the various forms of nature as such. For that aim it is of far more importance to comprehend the guiding principles of dialectics *viz. divisio* and *analysis*, as they provide the intrinsic impetus that propels the actual unravelling of this fourfold scheme. Given this dominance of a striking dialectical set-up over the actual subject-matter, the second division is clearly explicable as a profoundly rationalistic scheme, which is intentionally framed to facilitate man's understanding of and approach to *natura*.

Concerning the second division it is important to heed one other point. Because of its fully-fledged dialectical character this division should be considered as a fluctuating, i.e. non-static, scheme, since the modes of predication of God and creation are ultimately variable. On the surface of the text the original discrepancy between these realms seems to have vanished altogether, for it has become eclipsed by a dynamic interplay of related stages. Yet there appears to be some sort of progressive development as well, since all forms are bound to come to a final rest in God, who in his special capacity as the ultimate goal of all things is circumscribed through a process of ascending negativity: from uncreated and creative nature at first he now is predicated as *natura non creans et non creata*. The unfolding process of these more or less consecutive stages is dictated, as well as followed attentively, by human reason, to the innate structure of which the entire scheme thus appears to be intricately related.

*Ratio* should therefore rightfully be proclaimed as the governing principle in this fourfold division also, as its position achieves almost the same rank of distinction as in the first division. It organizes as well as establishes

this scheme, although in this latter division it marks the contours of *natura* in quite a different manner. Rather than constituting *natura* by dividing it into being and non-being, -an undertaking which reason was committed to in the first division-, it here directs the whole of *creator* and *creatura* via a dialectical movement to the absorbing last stage of *natura non creans et non creata* i.e. God, whose being on this level is not only indivisible but also ineffable. In his irreducible omnipresence as principle, cause and end at the same time, God effaces the preceding explicative stages so as to prevent their enduring after they have become eclipsed by the inaccessible light of his everlasting existence, in which all previous differences cannot be perceived anymore. In view of the above, the influence of reason in this fourfold division is evidently not that of an effective instrument to assess and demarcate the precise range of *natura*. Instead, it indicates the ultimate direction of nature's development inside the contours of its impalpable infinity. In this manner it paves the way for any of Eriugena's future queries.

### *B. The Intermediary Role of Reason*

It has been repeatedly stated that God and creation form the ultimate constituents of Eriugena's all-embracing concept of *natura*, whose boundaries up till now could not be explicitly defined by the human intellect. Yet human reason is indeed identified as the leading principle in Eriugena's approach to nature, operating through division as if deliberately moving away from defining nature. In the first division of nature Eriugena has instrumentalized human reason for the fundamental establishment of his ontology, in which he came to employ being and non-being alike as predication valid for describing the existent reality of the whole of *natura*.

By occupying such a crucial position in Eriugena's ontology, the specific connotations of which will shortly be explained, man's reasoning faculty was to assume a determining metaphysical role. The implications of reason's engagement with *natura* firstly relate to creation as the unquestioned realm of being: being is that which can be understood. With non-being we encounter a much more complicated situation, since the author knowingly includes what cannot be grasped by the mind in his overall concept of nature. On the one hand reason thus diminishes the range of its direct influence, as it falls short in grasping what is not. On the other hand, however, by consciously integrating non-being into *natura* as its object of investigation, reason allows the totality of nature actually to stretch into infinity. Eriugena can be seen to employ the predicate of *non esse* for God as well as for the reasons and essences of created being, since they all transcend the grasp of the human mind. There is also a legitimate, al-

beit partial, claim to *non esse* from matter on account of its analogy with the divine.<sup>5</sup> Yet in the final analysis only the inaccessible nature of God can be predicated as non-being in the true sense of surpassing all comprehension.

The term 'ontology' mentioned several times so far may strike one as being out of place with regard to Eriugena's first division of nature, as we have before us the absolute denial of being alongside various positive claims. To understand the intended use of the term here one should well be aware that for God the denial of being does not entail any consequences that could affect his existence in a negative way. Nor can it somehow harm the existence of universal *natura* by breaking off a part of its whole. For this reason non-being should in fact be subsumed under the term of ontology, as we have done above. In contrast to the opinion of some modern authors on the subject, it seems there is no need at all to postulate in Eriugena something like an apophatic ontology, or to indulge in the invention of alternative and artificial terminology such as the obscure notion of 'me-ontology'.<sup>6</sup> The following arguments back up our taking such a stand on this issue.

First of all, we should remember that Eriugena approaches both being and non-being from the same angle, that of intelligibility, rather than dealing with the problem of true or false existence. He passes a rational judgement over all things that can come to one's mind, presenting them through either a positive or a negative predication of their being. In other words, he engages in the assessment of being as well as non-being, in consequence of nature's specific relationship to the human mind. Secondly, since it is undeniably clear that both being and non-being derive from and circle around the axis of human reason, one ought to register the specific effects that this fundamental interrelation has upon them both. Eriugena's continuous renouncement of authority over the realm of non-being is ultimately inspired and dictated by the same faculty that is forced to retreat and thus appears to be defeated. This implies that reason has the opportunity, as it were, to exercise a reverse-control over what actually escapes from its grasp. As we pointed out above, the deliberate inclusion of all things that receive the predicate of non-being, with its seemingly unrestricted sphere of influence, considerably stretches the scope of *natura*. Through its ultimate dependence on the human mind, *non esse* turns out to retain its inverted affinity with being. Therefore, *natura* can still be

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<sup>5</sup> On the far-reaching analogy in the *Periphyseon* between the position of matter and the position of God e.g. on the point of negativity, see Allard 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Among modern Eriugena-scholars, Marenbon has referred to Eriugena's thought as 'apophatic ontology', see Marenbon 1981: 67-87, 83, 86. Moran coined the term 'me-ontology', see Moran 1989: 100.

predicated of the whole without any damage to its all-embracing character, nor to the facet of intelligibility as a notable characteristic.

Non-being, therefore, predicated and interpreted in the particular manner as referring to the divine supereminence that defeats the mind's perception, reveals obvious traces of a structural elusiveness that is built into Eriugena's approach to *natura*. In this respect there are two important aspects of our conclusions so far which deserve special attention here. The first is that although God has the status of non-being because of his not being comprehended, he is yet expressed in terms reflective of human comprehension i.e. 'being', although in the inverted form of *non esse*. We will return to this topic shortly, as it is indicative of the author's characteristic approach to the divine nature through negative theology, of which the so-called negative ontology forms only a minor part. The second aspect is that, although God in his capacity of non-being may not be comprehended, he is yet located within the confines of universal nature, which implies that he remains ultimately susceptible to the outflanking movements of Eriugena's reasoning faculty.

It is therefore the resilience of the mind that determines both being and non-being with the effect of a peremptory authority which cannot be superseded, even when it is not adequate to penetrate everything within nature's range. This means that God should be included positively in the first division as a substantial component of Eriugena's ontology. Although he possesses a superiority of being deriving from his transcendence of the human mind, it is yet the mind's decision to describe him in those terms. He thus remains within the boundaries of *natura* and is essentially dependent on the same umbilical cord through which the mind has created the very concept of nature. Moreover, notwithstanding the fact that God's elusiveness to the mind's defining grasp marks his ontological transcendence,<sup>7</sup> he is integrated in the first division by means of a simple negation: *esse* versus *non esse*. Thus he is placed in diametrical contrast to the realm of being rather than in any hierarchical order,<sup>8</sup> contributing to the state of being through logical opposition rather than altogether discrediting it. However much the hierarchy of God and creation will stay fundamentally intact, it is on a level of equivalence that being and non-being are introduced, as they are both based on one preceding rational distinction. Within the unbroken, all-embracing context of *natura* Eriugena will have to treat of God with the help of the same operative principle of ration-

<sup>7</sup> By this expression I want to refer to God's state of *non esse* as being superior to *esse* on account of the excellence of the divine nature, see *Per.* I 443B-C, Sh.-W.: 38-40.

<sup>8</sup> The renunciation of the hierarchical order may emerge also from the structure of the fourfold division with its four analogous forms and Eriugena's relinquishment of the scheme of causality, see above ch. 1.3.



ality with which he undertakes the analysis of creation. The road to God through immediate mental apprehension being thwarted, he will have to find different lines of approach.

I have argued that in the second, i.e. fourfold, division of nature the principle of rationality is not present as such, although the differences between the individual forms are ultimately rational or dialectical differences, discernible by the human mind only and articulated with the specific purpose of facilitating the mind's understanding. Human reason in this division is not so much a discriminatory principle as it is in the first division. Rather, it provides the power for the unravelling of the development of *natura* through division and analysis. As Eriugena states explicitly, the forms in this division are forms of our intelligence, not forms imposed by *natura* as such, whose all-embracing character surpasses human understanding altogether, reason forming but a small part of nature's vast expansiveness. As in the first division, the entities concerned by this division are God and creation, which are interrelated and differentiated through various predications of *natura*, its respective creative and created aspects uttered in an affirmative and negative manner. Eriugena shows a similar tendency here to bridge the radical discrepancy between God and creation by putting them not as extremes on a vertical scale, but approaching them similarly as relative parts of nature, distinguished only through their various modes of predication. Despite their radical differences, they yet hold positions of fundamental equivalence. Through the dialectically shaped process of division and analysis, reason gives the original impetus for the unfolding of creation and its final return to God by tracing its course and thereby controlling its advance.

Thus reason will eventually hold full responsibility for arrival at the last stage, where the process of division is to reach its full completion. This last stage is embodied by God as the *natura non creans et non creata*, in which all of creation comes to rest after the foregoing stages have been gathered under the wings of the one divine essence. The gradual explication of *natura* in the first three levels is in sharp contrast to this final act of condensation, where God appears to be the vanishing-point in which the fourfold division gets fully absorbed. Yet, however much God as the actual goal to which all things aspire is in himself declared inaccessible for human thoughts and ineffable for human speech<sup>9</sup> (for because of his indivisibility he cannot be appropriately dealt with in this quadruple division), it is

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<sup>9</sup> God is frequently described by means of the adjectives *inaccessibilis* (e.g. *Per.* I 448C, Sh.-W.: 50; 458A, Sh.-W.: 72; 522C, Sh.-W.: 218, in which the author quotes from 1 Tim. 6: 16: *Qui solus habet immortalitatem et lucem habitat inaccessibilem*; these are all occurrences of *inaccessibilis* in *Per.* I) and *ineffabilis* (e.g. *Per.* I 450B, Sh.-W.: 54: *ipsius enim ineffabilis excellentia*; 460C, Sh.-W.: 78: *ineffabilis natura*; 512C, Sh.-W.: 196: *quadam necessitate ineffabilis naturae significandae*).

nevertheless only through the dialectical act of *analysis* that the final unification of *creator* and *creatura* can take place at all. As it was through the explanation of *analysis* that Eriugena established the four species in Book II and in a sense initiated the process of their unfolding, it will be through that same act of *analysis* that he will accomplish their intended reunion with God, thereby bringing about the perfection of this division in an unremitting pursuit of a complete treatment of *natura* in which no aspect is left untouched.

### C. Summary

God as the actual purpose and destination of the fourfold division will not be grasped completely through the process of division and analysis, just as God the true non-being in the first and foremost division successfully escapes from the mind's grasp. However, in this first division the principle of rationality integrates the realm of being with the realm of non-being, because they are mutually dependent on the same source, and in this manner some sort of understanding of God is implied. In the fourfold division we can observe a similar phenomenon, for although the ultimate inaccessibility and transcendence of God is not infringed, the dialectical framework governed by reason will at least involve him in its development and through this integration reason will manage to clarify God's position to some degree. Thus it is through a dialectical scheme, of which the dynamic movement is understandable for human reason, that we get a certain grasp of *natura's* being in this fourfold division. The set-up of this scheme once again demonstrates the *Periphyseon's* basic tendency to link ontology and intelligibility, all the while safeguarding the ultimate transcendence of God.

In the fourfold division Eriugena does not markedly bring out God's superiority, as the contrast of being and non-being does in the first division. Yet he again makes use of negation to secure the unreachableness of God lest he should be compromised by condescending to the level of creation.<sup>10</sup> The incorporation of God within the concept of *natura*, in which he holds a position undistinguishable from and thus comparable to the other stages, remains nonetheless in power. The congruity of ontology and intelligibility remains unaffected too, as God's being is simply not denied in this scheme. But the effect of negative predication now comes to disaffirm his most characteristic feature, for it brings to a standstill his

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<sup>10</sup> The concept of theophany, which will be dealt with in ch. 2.3, suggests that God can condescend to creation without compromising his divine character, see *Per.* I 449D, Sh.-W.: 54: *Ex deo itaque theophaniae in natura angelica atque humana illuminata purgata perfecta per gratiam fiunt ex descensione divinae sapientiae et ascensione humanae angelicaeque intelligentiae.*

capacity of creating, depicting him in the fourth stage as *natura non creans* (*et non creata*). The consequences of this radical measure will have to receive more attention.

Through negation, therefore, God's transcendence stands out both in the first and in the second division of nature. Although this entails the denial of being in the first division, it does not break the essential bond between ontology and intelligibility, which remains a principal feature of Eriugena's speculative thought. But we still have to face the remaining problem that underneath the intrinsic coherence of ontology and intelligibility, much as it elucidates the author's wide-ranging notion of *natura* in both the first and the second division, there are no certain predetermined means for human reason to attain God, who is the prescribed aim of all true philosophy and true religion. God appears always to be found at the edge of Eriugena's concept of *natura*, coercing reason continuously to stretch its scope, and even though he is located within its all-embracing range of influence, he cannot be defined by the intellect because of his constant reference to negative predication. It is through opposition by negation that God is somehow isolated from creation, although Eriugena has managed to efface the original hierarchical relationship between God and creation on the surface of his text. Through the effectiveness of his principle of rationality, which comes to bear on all his judgements regarding *natura*, God's transcendence becomes transformed into ineffableness, i.e. a structural impossibility of affirmative statements, even when they concern the substantial quality of being or a traditional divine attribute like creation. We therefore should examine the negative approach to God in the context of the author's overall rational investigation of nature more closely.

## 2.1. *The Road from Creation to God. The Negative Approach*

### A. *Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology*

In talking about God Eriugena makes frequent use of unusual negative predications, such as *non esse* in the first division and *non creans* in the second, to bring out God's superiority over creation. Whatever the purport of these individual negations may be, they can be put together in that they form only a small part of a much larger body of negative statements about God, commonly referred to as negative theology. Negative theology usually indicates the endeavour to describe and contemplate the divine nature through the abnegation of all its traditional divine attributes. However, in the *Periphyseon* the author's employment of negative theology discloses most of all his unusual awareness of the facilities of human lan-

guage, as he makes extraordinary use of its flexibility in the search for God, who is the final goal of all reasoning. Where this will eventually lead him with regard to his overall view of *natura*, we will now try to evaluate.

Eriugena first brings up the topic of negative theology, in direct relation to its affirmative counterpart, in the course of explaining the first form of nature, the divine *natura creans et non creata*, the subject of Book I. The Student has just posed the question how God as the universal cause of all things can be predicated both as unity and as Trinity.<sup>11</sup> Before giving his reply the Master reveals what will be his central premise throughout in dealing with God, quoting the following apodeictic statement of Pseudo-Dionysius. A more radical starting-point can hardly be imagined:

The highest and causal essence of all things cannot be signified at all: not by any meaning of words or names or any other kind of articulate speech. (*Per.* I 456A, Sh.-W.: 68)

The divine superiority having been made abundantly clear, the original question must still be answered. Regarding the three persons of the Trinity, the Master declares them to have individual names for the sake of designating their relation to each other -God being essentially one-, rather than denoting various divine substances (*Non enim potes negare talia nomina, id est patrem et filium, relativa esse, non substantiva, Per.* I 457C, Sh.-W.: 72). Returning to the discussion's starting-point, God in his capacity as universal cause, the Student thereupon expresses his wish to know whether the familiar Aristotelian categories are applicable at all to God,<sup>12</sup> a matter which had busied the thought of various thinkers before as well as in Eriugena's times.<sup>13</sup>

Yet before coming round to the actual treatment of the categories as the apparent problem under discussion, the Master first embarks upon an exposition of the two Dionysian branches of theology, introducing the affirmative or *καταφατική* along with the negative or *ἀποφατική*. For the purpose of dealing with matters of the divine -being shut off from creation- he views both these theological methods as offering the only valid ways of speaking about God, as opposed to silently revering him, as he surpasses every intellect. They can at least lead to what is likely to be the truth (*verisimile*).<sup>14</sup> What the implications are with regard to God he will presently

<sup>11</sup> *Per.* I 455D, Sh.-W.: 68: A. *Velim tamen audire qua ratione theologi unitatem et trinitatem de causa omnium praedicare ausi sunt.* The Student here quotes from Pseudo-Dionysius *Div. Nom.* XIII §3, PG 3, 980C-981B about the unity and Trinity of God, who is beyond every name that can be given to him.

<sup>12</sup> See *Per.* I 457D-458A, Sh.-W.: 72.

<sup>13</sup> For a succinct summary of this matter, see Marenbon 1981: 12-29 (ch. 1), 67-86 (ch. 3).

<sup>14</sup> *Per.* I 458A, Sh.-W.: 72:.....*verisimile suadebit.* For the interpretation of 'verisimilitude' as an important scientific category, see Schrimpf 1982: 251-252.

reveal. His first pronouncement about these fundamental approaches to the divine runs as follows:

M. One branch of theology, namely ἀποφατική [the apophatic one], denies that the divine essence or substance is one of the things that are, that is, of the things that can be named or understood; the other branch, however, namely καταφατική [the kataphatic one], predicates of the divine essence all the things that are and, for that reason, is named 'affirmative' -not so as to establish that the divine essence is any of the things that are, but to argue that all the things that stem from it can be predicated of it. (*Per.* I 458A-B, Sh.-W.: 74)

In the ensuing debate the question arises why, as Dionysius has stated, Divine Names like *essentia*, *bonitas*, *veritas* etc. through which God is so often implored, can only be predicated of him metaphorically, i.e. through a transference of meaning from creation to creator, despite their obvious divine connotations. The reason for this is found naturally in the absolute transcendence of the divine nature, which excludes the very possibility of anything ranked beside itself. When asked, the Student denies that anything opposed to God or associated with him that is of another essence, i.e. ἑτεροούσιον, can even exist. This would indeed be logically impossible. The very nature of an oppositional relation rules out the possibility of the contraries being eternal. Opposites always begin and end at the same time, depending on and actually presupposing each other's existence. Through the disagreement inherent in their relation they must necessarily be in conflict with the notion of eternity itself, which by nature always refers to a single and indivisible unity. God is therefore in fact the only eternal principle. If, on the other hand, there would be something imaginable that is of another essence than the divine, as a matter of consequence this would imply the existence of two eternal principles, which cannot be brought into harmony with the doctrine that ultimately things derive their being from only one source. In short, what is not co-essential with God can never be co-eternal with him; and to be co-essential and thereby co-eternal with God is in conflict with the theory of a universal cause.<sup>15</sup>

After this exemplary school exposition by the Student, who proves himself to be a quick and argumentative pupil,<sup>16</sup> the Master does not draw any direct inferences with regard to the applicability of the categories to God. Instead he returns to the theme of the so-called Divine Names. Rather than considering the various divine qualities designated by the in-

<sup>15</sup> This whole paragraph is a summary of *Per.* I 458C-459B, Sh.-W.: 74-76.

<sup>16</sup> For a noteworthy comment on the educational character of the *Periphyseon* as a dialogue between a Master and his Student, see Allard 1977.

dividual names and thus following the line of the previous discussion centring around the problem of describing the divine nature by its most obvious divine quality *viz.* eternity, the Master now advocates another angle of approach as he tackles the question of their predicative character. He thereby transfers the problem from an implied metaphysical level -the divine essence; how to approximate it- to the level of human speech or human language.<sup>17</sup> Rather than intending to imitate the divine essence, Eriugena here initiates a discussion that pivots around the range of influence and degree of exactitude implicit in predications of God. He appears to contemplate the Divine Names (a matter which was already familiar to him through the work of that same name by Pseudo-Dionysius)<sup>18</sup> in relation to predicative form as the exclusive vehicle of rational content. Since the Divine Names as variable predications all have names opposed to them, the things denoted by them must also have contrary things standing in opposition to them. Therefore they are not quite appropriate as names for God, whose very nature, as has been shown, does not tolerate anything opposed to him or coeternal with him. Despite their ultimate inadequacy for enclosing the divine nature, an imaginary possibility which Dionysius had already ruled out, the Divine Names maintain some predicative value on the level of language, if only as metaphors transposed from creation to creator. Eriugena interprets as such the biblical significations, of which he previously gave some examples.<sup>19</sup> But he arrives now at a remarkable conclusion. Meanwhile his indebtedness to Dionysius takes ever clearer, more literal shape, as he adopts his predecessor's Greek terminology.

M. Thus God is called 'essence', but properly speaking he is not essence. For non-essence [non-being] is opposed to essence [being]. Therefore, God is ὑπερούσιος, that is superessential [above-being]. In the same way he is called 'goodness', but properly speaking he is not goodness. For wickedness is opposed to goodness. Therefore he is ὑπεράγαθος, that is more-than-good, and ὑπεραγαθότης, that is above-goodness. God is called 'God' but properly speaking he is not God. For blindness is opposed to vision and not-seeing to seeing. Therefore, he is ὑπέρθεος, that is more-than-God. For θεός is interpreted as 'seeing'. But if you resort to the other root of this name, so that you understand θεός that is God to be derived not from the verb θεωρῶ, that is 'I see', but from the verb θέω, that is 'I run', you notice that the same reasoning applies. For not-running is opposed to running, just as slowness is opposed to fastness. Therefore, God will be ὑπέρθεος, that is more-than-running, as it is written: 'His Word runneth swiftly.'<sup>20</sup> Then we can under-

<sup>17</sup> For a general discussion of Eriugena's use of language, see D.J. O'Meara 1983; Beierwaltes 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Eriugena translated the Divine Names into Latin; see PL 122, 1111-1171.

<sup>19</sup> *Per.* I 458B, Sh.-W.: 74.

<sup>20</sup> Vulg. Ps. 147:15.

stand this to apply to God as 'the Word', which runs ineffably through all the things that are, in order that they may be. (*Per.* I 459D-460A, Sh.-W.: 76-78)<sup>21</sup>

Eriugena does not hesitate radically to deny the effectivity of the Divine Names, rather than contenting himself with their metaphorical value, to the effect of renouncing their ultimate meaningfulness. They simply cannot make clear what God is *proprie*.<sup>22</sup> This denial of the Divine Names is in fact more accurate to express the divine dignity in view of its superiority towards creation. Metaphorically, however, Divine Names may still be predicated of God, their limited power of expression safeguarding the divine transcendence at any moment. God is called being (*esse*), but it will have to be admitted that ultimately he is not. However, Eriugena does not want to stop having established the greater suitability of negative statements. In an attempt to overcome the discrepancy between the acumen of the denial and the meaningful content of positive predication, he concludes that the most adequate expression preserving both the positive and the negative claims is *superessentialis*. In a like manner he reshapes the other Divine Names, the efficacy of which can be heightened by adding the prefix *super-* or *plus-quam-*. Eriugena, more than Pseudo-Dionysius before him, who saw all names of God as defective means of invoking a *deus absconditus*,<sup>23</sup> seems interested in applying this technique methodologically, styling a new usage of language in which the predication of God is after all immediately possible. The possibility of proper predication appears to be of central importance in dealing with God, as it preserves the aptitude of language as a means for the structural articulation of the divine through the dialectical process of human ratiocination.

Yet Eriugena's procedure of approaching God from the angle of human speech instead of taking his starting-point in God's very exaltedness, as was the case in Dionysius, has radical consequences for the evaluation of the final effectiveness of his predications. The question of whether things can be predicated *proprie* or *per metaphoram* has already been touched upon. Eriugena opts to contradict apophatic and kataphatic theology so as to approach the divine excellence through their very conflict. He thereby applies his chosen technique so consistently that he is ultimately forced to

<sup>21</sup> The passage continues in the same way until *Per.* I 460B, Sh.-W.: 78: .....*sufficienter dictum est.*

<sup>22</sup> *Per.* I 460C, Sh.-W.: 78: *Non enim proprie sed translativè dicitur essentia veritas sapientia caeteraque huius modi....*

<sup>23</sup> See especially Eriugena's translation of Dionysius' *Myst. Theol.*, PL 122, 1171-1175. As Roques (1962: 43) points out, Dionysius takes these negations in a transcendent sense, whereas in my view Eriugena does not. This may also explain why Dionysius can address God as *ὑπέρθεος* (see e.g. *Myst. Theol.* §1, PG 3, 997A), whereas Eriugena adheres to discursive and oblique reasoning.

repudiate even God's own name as an appropriate description of the divine nature, a measure of which the consequences are here much more radical than in Dionysius.<sup>24</sup> God, whose name in Greek is derived etymologically from either the verb *θεῶ*, i.e. to see, or else from the verb *θεωρῶ*, i.e. to run, is in fact not predicated properly by his very own name. The most extreme outcome of the author's predicative procedure is thus that God is actually not God at all. He can only be predicated as God metaphorically, i.e. by a transference from the level of creation to the level of creator, thereby giving rise to a 'contradiction in terms' since the very name of God by nature indicates the disqualification of the created level.

Earlier on in Book I Eriugena had already experienced similar difficulties. Taking up the discussion of the *nomen deus*, the name of 'God', he there aligned it with other Divine Names, such as essence and truth, as the name most frequently used in Holy Scripture for the metaphorical designation of the divine nature. On that occasion he made use of the same etymology of the word *deus*, based on the Greek verbs 'to see' and 'to run', but his relativization of their adequacy did not express itself in the conversion of both into the transcending notion of '*hypertheos*', as it will now. Instead both etymological roots were accepted as variable, equally valid, causal descriptions, to the extent that it was through God's running and God's seeing, as found exemplified in some biblical passages, that all things were originally made.<sup>25</sup> Thus in that earlier case we also find the problem of the tentative, created character of language artificially reshaped so as to reflect properly the divine nature.<sup>26</sup>

The variety of the Divine Names with their metaphorical truth vouches despite its shortcomings for a kaleidoscopic spectrum. But underneath the radiating richness of their prismatic perspective, their multitude breaks up the targeted vision of the beholder, who anxiously searches for one indivisible God. By resorting to expressions with the prefix *super-* or *plus-quam-* Eriugena has shattered the immediate view of the divine cause, although he reserves the possibility that a ray of true light may travel un-

<sup>24</sup> Eriugena does not invoke God as *superdeus*, but instead seems to describe or even identify him as such. See above n. 23.

<sup>25</sup> *Per.* I 452B-D, Sh.-W.: 60. In this passage Eriugena uses again the Greek etymology of 'God', arriving at the following conclusion: *Non enim aliud est deo currere per omnia quam videre omnia, sed sicut videndo ita et currendo fiunt omnia.*

<sup>26</sup> Although both Eriugena and Pseudo-Dionysius use the same 'superlanguage', yet I think there is an unmistakable distinction between the Dionysian atmosphere, where the various superlatives together are still not capable of attaining the divine, and the more 'realistic' Eriugenian logic, which gives up the attempt at shaping a superlanguage once its defeat is inevitable. The determining factor in Eriugena's reasoning is in my view its down-to-earth starting-point and continuous frame of reference: the limitations of created language.



hindered from God as the object of vision to the beholder. But the determined attempt to communicate the divine nature to creation directly, that is without recourse to any intermediate i.e. metaphorical principles, seems to imply the fading of all colours into a dim grey, because the predication meant to replace the Divine Names turn out to be for the most part of a formal 'superlative' character. Their meaningful content being as yet unclear, we will follow the *Periphyseon*'s text so as further to contemplate their function.

Having established this new usage of language (*super-*, *plus-quam-*), however complicated it still may be, Eriugena returns to the two branches of affirmative and negative theology. He shows how, despite their oppositional character, they are found not to be in contrast so as definitely to exclude each other in respect to God:

M. So listen then more carefully. For when you have attained the insight of perfect reasoning, you will see in a clear enough manner that these two [branches of theology] which seem to be contrary to each other, are not at all opposed to each other when applied to the divine nature, but are quite in harmony with each other through and in all things; and to make this more clear, let us give some examples. For instance: *καταφατική* says: 'God is truth'; but *ἀποφατική* contradicts: 'God is not truth'. There seems to arise some sort of contradiction here, but on closer inspection no incompatibility is found. For the [kataphatic] branch that says: 'God is truth', does not actually establish that the divine substance is truth, but rather that it can be called by such a name through a transference of meaning from creation to creator. Thus with such names it cloaks the naked divine essence which was deprived of all actual meaning. On the other hand, the [apophatic] branch that says: 'God is not truth', while it rightly recognizes that the divine nature is incomprehensible and ineffable, does not deny that it is, but denies that properly speaking it can be called or be truth. For *ἀποφατική* continually strips the divinity of all the meanings with which *καταφατική* clothes it. Whereas the one says: 'God is wisdom', for example, thereby clothing it; the other says: 'God is not wisdom', thereby unclothing it again. In conclusion, the one says: 'God can be called this', but does not say: 'God actually is this'; the other says: 'God is not this, although he can be named after this'. (*Per.* I 461B-D, Sh.-W.: 80-82)

In this passage Eriugena now attempts to harmonize apophatic and kataphatic theology, while not doing away with their contrastive characters. His reasoning is that, applied to God, the positive and negative mode can never form a contradiction, since they demonstrate fundamentally different intentions. The affirmative mode reveals a metaphorical purpose, clothing the divine essence with its names as with colourful garments. The negative mode strips off these robes by saying that despite their metaphorical applicability to God, they cannot approximate to his incomprehensible and inexpressible nature. Once again, in a more sys-

tematic and therefore more radical way than Dionysius, Eriugena emphasizes the predicative quality of these two supreme branches of theology, which, in view of the divine, seem to balance each other despite their opposite characters.

But the boundaries of human language are stretched to the utmost in the author's attempt to reach for what actually cannot be attained. Here as in the two divisions of nature he has to resort to alternatives for a straightforward dealing with God, proceeding once again through the ordeal of an enveloping movement. And as yet it is left undecided whether there is any real progress. The many-sidedness of language, to be more precise the act of positive and negative predication, is explained here as the clothing and unclothing of the divine essence, the nakedness of which yet remains ultimately hidden as a matter extending beyond the range of human expression in speech. In fact this should seal the absolute inadequacy of language for the expression of God. But by establishing the extremes between which the divine nature must find itself, it appears that at least some of the broad kaleidoscopic spectrum of the Divine Names is preserved in the dual perspective of affirmation and denial, retaining meaning while admittedly dispelling it at the same time.

Through this constant shift of emphasis whereby apophatic and kataphatic predication alternate, forming a contradiction but not effectuating it, a firm assertion of the divine nature seems to emerge. It is as if the equivocal of predication from different perspectives enhances the univocal character of the divine essence, which functions after all as the centre of gravity underneath the various predications with which human language has attempted to cloak it. Thus it is the naked essence of the divine which, through the various attempts to represent it visually, is enabled to manifest itself, as it were, in human speech. However, in the upshot this constant intention to visualize God in speech appears to deprive all human predications directed to God of their contents, as the nakedness of the divine essence remains ultimately invisible. The external correctness of expression in terms like *superessentialis* covers but a meaningless void. Still, on closer inspection it appears that this discussion is by no means without positive results.

By approaching the Divine Names from the point of view of predicative appropriateness, it was apparently not so much Eriugena's point to do complete justice to the divine superiority, which after all had been declared impossible in principle, but rather to find the right effective balance between the divine superexcellence on the one hand and the boundaries of human language on the other. The divine eminence as such can never be adequately expressed, the terms with *super-* or *plus-quam-* not even coming close to capturing it in its fullest sense. Yet from the point

of view of human speech they give the most satisfactory account of the various options at its disposal, for in these terms the divine nature is not only fully preserved, but also in a sense successfully fenced in. During the author's acute reflections, his subtle handling of different networks of predication, his careful mingling of affirmation and negation, the room is created for God to manifest himself as he inevitably comes to the fore in these drawn-out speculations. As becomes clear in the closing statement of the discussion of the Divine Names, it cannot but be a self-regulated divine manifestation that can be traced in the words with *super-* and *plus-quam-*:

M. Let then, with your consent, the solution to the present question be as follows: namely that these names which can be predicated of God through the addition of the particles 'above-' or 'more-than-' such as superessential, or more-than-truth, or more-than-wisdom, and the like can comprise within themselves most fully the two aforementioned branches of theology in such a way that they have the affirmative one's outlook in expression, while they have the negative one's impact in meaning. Let us then conclude with the following brief example: 'God is essence', is an affirmation; 'God is not essence', is a denial; 'God is superessential', is both affirmation and denial, for while on the surface it lacks negation, in meaning it is strong in negation. For that which says: 'God is superessential', does not say what God is but what he is not; for it says that God is not essence but more-than-essence. What that is which is more-than-essence, it does not reveal. For it says that God is not any of the things that are but that he is more than the things that are, but what that being is, it in no way defines. (*Per.* I 462C-D, Sh.-W.: 82-84)

In a final attempt to classify the words with *super-* and *plus-quam-* the Master regards them as reconciling the affirmative and negative paths of theology, since they combine a positive form with a negative meaning. In this manner they come close to touching on the ineffable nakedness of the divine essence itself. Through the process of enrobing the divine nature with garments of meaning, which in a subsequent movement are stripped off again, the divine nature seems to become transparent, in the sense that, through the effects of negation, the metaphorical predications, while losing their original power of a diffuse positive reference, regain in accuracy what they have lost in meaning. What is ultimately left is in fact the divine essence itself, which charges the terms with *super-* and *plus-quam-* with its radiating power as they are being applied to it.

Because of the overpowering momentum of its essence, the divine nature is the only firm starting-point for Eriugena's new use of language. In it we become confronted with the remarkable phenomenon that the value of predicates is gauged by their object, rather than vice versa. The total lack of orientation which made Eriugena describe *deus* as just another

name that should be overcome by the employment of the substituting *ὑπέρθεος*, has become transformed into a new level of language, where the divine essence can pin-point its own predicates with an exactitude not demonstrated before.

In the end the Divine Names do remain in force, but their significance stands aloof from their original use in Pseudo-Dionysius, as their efficacy now rests on the basis of the grip the divine essence itself holds over the articulation of its majesty. Predications like *superessentialis*, therefore, much as they appear to be positive assertions, succumb ultimately to the very ineffability of the divine essence, since they can make clear only what God is not. In this they obey the regulations which Eriugena has laid down in his prologue, where he qualified God as *non esse* in the interpretive sense of *intentionem animi superare*, and has further explained the divine *non esse* as corresponding to the Dionysian *super esse*.<sup>27</sup> While explicitly refraining from anything resembling definition, it is through an increase in negative exactitude that Eriugena proceeds, designing his own normative linguistic system to express with precision what is in itself inexpressible. This negative approach is comprehensible only against the background of the author's first division of nature and its elaboration in the first mode of interpretation. Likewise it reinterprets the divine transcendence of human understanding by resorting to negative predication, in order to emphasize its all-time separation from creation rather than discrediting the material contents of its positive counterpart as such. At the same time this proposed linguistic system marks a step forward, in the sense that Eriugena contrives to give utterance to the divine ineffability in expressions which manifest an affirmative form but maintain their negative import. This unique amalgamation is distinctively conveyed by means of the prefixes *super-* or *plus-quam-*.

### B. The Position of the Categories

Yet Eriugena does not succeed in making this linguistic system a real system, so that it would be applicable to his overall division of nature. This may very well never have been his intention, as there are obviously too many ready-made issues with which he has to deal in the course of the *Periphyseon*'s unfolding.<sup>28</sup> One of the more traditional school subjects is the question of the categories, which Eriugena treats of at length in Book I only to arrive at a completely negative outcome, in that the categories

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Per.* I 443A-B, Sh.-W.: 38. See above ch. 1.1.

<sup>28</sup> For the character of the *Periphyseon* as a discussion of traditional school topics, cf. Marenbon 1981: 12-29 (ch.1).

can by no means be applied to God. Not even the highest category of *usia*,<sup>29</sup> which in Augustine's view could still represent the divine essence most accurately,<sup>30</sup> qualifies as an appropriate vehicle for the explication of the divine nature. In fact, Eriugena's extensive treatment of the Aristotelian categories is, despite the substantial impression it makes on readers of the *Periphyseon* by virtue of its length, nothing more than a mere embroidering of the issue of negative theology. The following arguments may serve to illustrate this.

It is while discussing the applicability of the categories to God that Eriugena feels it necessary to introduce the branches of theology, which come to prepare the final settlement of the matter. Although the two themes are at first interwoven, the problem of apophatic and kataphatic theology becomes gradually isolated from the discussion of the categories, the latter topic being momentarily deferred. Eriugena deals with the two opposite branches of theology in the specific Dionysian context of the Divine Names, whereby he comes to formulate his innovative approach to the ineffable divine nature through metaphorical predication corrected by negativity. But he returns to the problem of the categories immediately after his concluding remarks on the predication with *super-* and *plus-quam-*, and pursues the case of their impropriety for the articulation of the divine nature. And it is with the arguments previously used when allowing only the metaphorical applicability of the Divine Names that Eriugena now appears to treat the ten individual categories.

Eriugena's corollary on the first and the highest of the categories leaves us in no doubt as to his intention of discrediting their direct validity regarding the just representation of God, much in the same way as he dismissed the alleged direct efficacy of the Divine Names:<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Marenbon 1981: 67-87 (ch.3, Problems of the Categories, essence and the Universals in the work of John Scottus and Ratramnus of Corbie). Eriugena was familiar with the Aristotelian categories through the reading of a popular paraphrase of Aristotle's work, which was wrongly attributed to Augustine, the so-called *Categoriae Decem*.

<sup>30</sup> See *De trin.* V, I-VIII. See especially V, II, 3 where Augustine defends the use of *usia* for God on the basis of Ex. 1:14: *Ego sum qui sum*.

<sup>31</sup> It is important to notice that Eriugena always seems to begin his argument by taking the most rigid stand: cf. his discussion of apophatic and kataphatic theology, where he started out by denying the possibility that God could be adequately expressed in human language, afterwards diversifying his opinion. Here Eriugena opens the discussion of the categories by denying their applicability to God. He then gets entangled in a lengthy discussion about the categories, revealing sophisticated knowledge of the subject. See *Per.* I 463C, Sh.-W.: 86: A. *Clare conspicio nulla ratione kategorias de natura ineffabili proprie posse praedicari. Nam si aliqua kategoriarum de deo proprie praedicaretur necessario genus esse deus sequeretur; deus autem nec genus nec species nec accidens est: nulla igitur kategoria proprie deum significare potest.*

S. God then is not οὐσία [essence], because he is more than οὐσία, and yet he is called οὐσία because he is the creator of all οὐσίαι. (*Per.* I 464A, Sh.-W.: 86)

The categories, which are capable of classifying exhaustively all things that come after God, cannot be stretched to include God also. Their universal validity is heavily questioned, and turns out to be seriously impaired, as they appear to be of secondary importance only because of their metaphorical reference to God. Underneath any positive assertion the negative meaning yet prevails. It is in this same manner that Eriugena summarizes his exposition of the categories, i.e. as an elaboration of the theme of negative theology and not because of any interest shown in the theoretical applicability of the categories as such.<sup>32</sup> The discussion and elaboration of the position of the categories, and their application to God, was undoubtedly a major philosophical issue at the time, considering among other things the popularity of the *Categoriae Decem*, to the marketable contents of which was added the weight of Augustine's name. However, in view of the divine supereminence Eriugena treats the categories not so much as instruments of logical analysis, but rather as Divine Names, the direct efficacy of which must become ultimately discredited. Thus they provide him above all with an excellent opportunity ostensibly to demonstrate his skill in applying the art of negative theology. On top of that they enable him to develop his own views on the possibility of framing valid statements about the divine nature. In the last analysis it is the formulation of expressions with *super-* and *plus-quam-* which appears to be Eriugena's greatest achievement in this respect, more so than his theory of the categories as such.

### C. The Outcome of the Negative Approach: Success or Defeat

Yet Eriugena's greatest accomplishment so far runs the risk of being his greatest failure for precisely the same reasons, namely that he has succeeded in stretching the boundaries of human language up to such a point that it seems to be the divine nature itself which defines the terms of its expression rather than vice versa. From the point of view of the divine essence, words like *superessentialis*, combining apophatic and kataphatic theology in a sublimated form, appear to be most appropriate, for they radically distinguish God from creation while in no way hampering his freedom of movement. In this respect they come as close to the nakedness of the divine essence as one can possibly get. But the overpowering elusiveness of

<sup>32</sup> Against Marenbon 1981: 67. Although Eriugena's reflections on the categories should be considered both innovative and important, in the end the categories form only an issue of secondary importance in the *Periphyseon*.

God modifies human language to such an extent that vacuity of meaning turns out to be the only appropriate 'content' of its predication. Thus, from the point of view of human language, the intended balance between preserving the divine transcendence on the one hand and securing at least a partial comprehension of it on the other, tilts over, to the effect that, with the increase of predicative effectivity apparent in the superlative terms which form the language of the divine, their concrete meaningfulness becomes more and more undermined.

In the face of the divine transcendence human language threatens to lose its power of expression entirely. Its only option now left is to peer down into the abyss of divine nothingness, as it is forced to content itself with the sheer emptiness that is conveyed by these superlative predications. It is therefore quite illustrative that in his excursus on the divine *nihil* in Book III of the *Periphyseon* Eriugena frequently returns to the term *superessentialis* and its variants, and can also be found occasionally to speak in terms of God's 'supernatural' state, whereas apart from those instances he only sporadically employs the expressions with *super-* and *plus-quam-* in the rest of his dialogue.<sup>33</sup> It is clearly as if this language, designed for expressing the divine, overreaches itself in stretching the boundaries of human predications to the utmost. Having once borne the torrents of a rapid development it has become completely stagnated before the ultimate ineffability of God, which does not yet completely yield to any of its assertions.

## 2.2. *Transition to a New Set of Metaphors*

In consequence of the defeat of the negative approach sketched above Eriugena retraces his steps on the path of negative theology and returns to the use of positive references, to which the branch of kataphatic theology had previously laid its claim. He apparently chooses fully to retreat behind the walls of human predication, sacrificing the exactitude inherent in negative statements. But the power of expression of human speech is considerably fortified now, for the positive assertions, which completely missed the target when unreflectively directed towards God, appear to be of valuable, albeit still limited worth, if they are viewed and interpreted as metaphorical predications. The irrefutable certainty that the nakedness of the divine nature is unattainable in itself can, in retrospect, be seen to sanction the distance of metaphors as useful and satisfactory. Eriugena thus resorts to both the Divine Names and the categories to give an indirect yet comprehensible account of God's transcendence, investing the

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<sup>33</sup> On *nihil*, see Book III, see *Per.* III 634A-690B, Sh.-W.: 60-188.

divine with the colourful garments of a created richness. He restricts himself to the realm of created nature, by using predications which only apply to God *translative* i.e. through transference from created to creative nature,<sup>34</sup> yet he thus brings forth initiatives that for their impact are not restricted to created nature only. The outcome of the consistent application of negative theology before, which culminated in the systematic use of expressions with *super-* and *plus-quam-*, inaugurated a definitive shift of balance to the predominating influence of God. In this superlanguage God could retain all his freedom of movement, while his universality was marked off only in a negative way. Thus the divine nature was urged to manifest itself in human language, rather than to be inaccurately portrayed in terms foreign to its lofty state.

This state of affairs still persists in the subsequently championed metaphorical application of positive expressions, notwithstanding the disappointing dismantling of the superlative assertions through the admission of their final inadequacy. Underneath the transference of created statements to the level of creator, we can trace what is in fact a movement in the opposite direction, as it is the outreaching power of God that now becomes visible in creation. God seems to be actively involved in the transference of meaning from creation to creator by condescending to the level of creation, while nevertheless preserving his ultimate inaccessibility without compromise. Thus the unweakened expressiveness of the metaphors can be safeguarded, for they reflect a built-in distance regarding the elevated object of their description. Eriugena obviously thinks in that direction when in Book II he switches from negative to affirmative theology, introducing it as follows:

M. But now we try to inspect the other one, namely *καταφατική*, under the guidance of him who is sought and who seeks to be sought and comes to those who seek him, desiring to be found. And this is the part that contemplates what is to be posited, as if it applied properly, about the divine nature, and what should be cautiously and rationally understood about it. (*Per.* II 599D, Sh.-W.: 166-168)<sup>35</sup>

It is under the guidance of a God who allows himself to be understood that kataphatic theology can proceed and contemplate the divine nature, in

<sup>34</sup> For an example of Eriugena's metaphorical use of the categories, see *Per.* I 463C, Sh.-W.: 86, where he states that the categories may still be predicated of God as the Cause of all things, '*non ut proprie significant quid ipsa sit sed ut translative quid de ea nobis quodam modo eam inquiringibus probabiliter cogitandum est suadeant*'. He goes on to refer to his metaphorical treatment of the Divine Names, or the primordial causes, which made the solution of the problem of the categories relatively easily (*Per.* I 463D, Sh.-W.: 86).

<sup>35</sup> We can trace a vague reminiscence here of a passage in Augustine's opening prayer in the *Soliloquies* I, 6: *Fac me, Pater, quaerere te, vindica me ab errore; quaerenti te mihi nihil aliud pro te iam, quaeso, Pater.*



order to see not only what should be predicated of the divine nature 'as though literally', but also what should be carefully and reasonably understood. The role of reason in the reasonable and prudent understanding the author desires is obviously in keeping with the effect of such a predication *veluti proprie*, which functions as a sort of kataphatic expedient, helping human reason to proceed in the attempt to attain God as its ultimate goal.

But a clear understanding is apparently not to be reached, for the veil of kataphatic theology, although fully sanctioned now, still clothes and hides the naked divine essence, heightening its visibility while at the same time still recoiling in the face of its ultimate invisibility. Thus it seems that, although it has been adjusted by a confrontation with the corrective powers exerted by its negative counterpart to the extent that a glimpse of the divine nature in an act of self-manifestation can indeed be caught, kataphatic theology does not succeed. It is ultimately unable to overcome the one obstacle hampering its vision, which is erected by the transcendence of the divine nature itself. This obstacle, couched in such paraphrasing terms as *veluti proprie*, will always be blocking its sight.

This ultimate negative result, similar to the defeat of the negative approach, has still revealed characteristic features of Eriugena's attitude towards the problem of God and creation as the two components which make up the whole of *natura*. In his exploration of negative theology, he has managed to stretch the boundaries of human language to the utmost and thereby considerably increase its power of expression. While demarcating clearly which predications of the divine nature are to be considered appropriate and which not, he has advanced towards the nakedness of God, cloaking it with the almost transparent robes of the predications with *super-* and *plus-quam-*. Thus he has come to meet the divine nature halfway and has purposely entrusted to God all initiative as to the possible expressibility of his omnipotence, sealing off the conventional applicability of the Divine Names quite successfully.

In the upshot the early success of these Eriugenian superlatives as a progressive development of human predication proves to be their ultimate shortcoming as well. In view of their confrontation with the eminence of the divine essence, which Dionysius calls ὑπερπλήρης, being 'overfull',<sup>36</sup> their emptiness stands out all the more. There can be no more reliance on or recourse to the independent function of language as such, for Eriugena has sacrificed the adequacy of the Divine Names and substituted his superlatives, which do not possess the faintest shade of content. Yet there can also be no successful description of the divine nature in its naked essence, because the garments of this new mode of predication, while be-

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<sup>36</sup> See Pseudo-Dionysius, *De div. nom.* II §10, PG 3, 649A.

ing less concealing, will however not accomplish the complete unveiling of God's true character. Eriugena has necessarily to resort to God's self-manifestation which became emphasized as an indirect consequence of his methodological procedure with regard to the predicative validity of human language. Despite the discarding of all superlative predications, the apparent self-manifestation of the divine seems to subsist in the statements made by kataphatic theology to the point of forming their ultimate identity.

The *veluti proprie* of human language, therefore, in a movement of flagrant paradox simultaneously constitutes its defeat and its triumph. It guarantees the distance between the divine essence and the realm of creation at the expense of a complete grasp of God in terms of human predication. But the very concession of a defective understanding of the divine nature leaves room for God to manifest himself to creation in a way which springs forth directly from the nakedness of his nature and thereby elevates human language to a level where it is closest to direct communication with its creator. We yet have to see how this communication will be carried out.

Eriugena will further explore the dimensions of kataphatic theology in Book II where he focuses extensively on the nature of the Trinity.<sup>37</sup> Near the end of his digression on the Trinity, having dealt with various aspects of the doctrine including a controversial treatment of the origin of the Holy Spirit -whether it proceeds from the Father alone or from the Father and or through the Son-, Eriugena gives a summarizing statement. What we have here appears to be a condensed but most lucid recapitulation of his position on apophatic and kataphatic theology. Once again this must lead inevitably to our previous observation that God's final supereminence can only be comprehended inasmuch as it manifests itself. The prescribed metaphorical distance of human predication embodied in the *veluti proprie* which limits the validity of all human statements, is here to find its origin and justification in another one of Eriugena's novel concepts, designed to smooth the way for the final reunion between God and creation, namely in theophany.

M. But all these things are more deeply and truly thought than they are put forward in speech, and more deeply and truly understood than they are thought, and they are of a deeper and truer nature than they are understood to be; they definitely transcend all understanding. For whatever things are said about the [divine] trinity of the simplest goodness, or can be thought

<sup>37</sup> In discussing God as the Cause of all things, the question arises whether there is but one cause or whether it is threefold. Here one should keep in mind that Eriugena places this discussion on the Trinity in the methodological context of a kataphatic approach to God. The subsequent discussion on the Trinity, both interior and exterior, drags on till *Per. II* 615D, Sh.-W.: 204.

or understood about it, are merely vestiges and theophanies of truth, not the truth itself, which transcends all insight not only of the rational creature but also of the intellectual creature. For it is not such a unity or trinity as can be thought by any creature, or can be understood by it or formed by any phantasy however lucid and truthful -for all these are deceptive when the end of contemplation is found in them-, since it is more-than-unity and more-than-trinity. Yet we are required to speak, think and have understanding about it in so far as the intellect may touch it, with holy theology as our guide and master, so that somehow we may have material with which to praise and bless it. (*Per.* II 614B-D, Sh.-W.: 200)

Eriugena obviously traces a hierarchical order here, starting out at the level of predication and gradually ascending through contemplation and understanding to the highest level of being, which surpasses all human understanding. These ascending levels serve to evoke the interior trinity by which the human soul through analogy resembles and corresponds with the divine Trinity. Before analyzing this passage, however, it is necessary to explain the structure of the human soul as it can be distilled from the *Periphyseon*.<sup>38</sup>

In Eriugena's view the human soul is the object of three universal motions,<sup>39</sup> the first of the mind, the second of the reason and the third of the senses. Eriugena has borrowed this scheme from Maximus the Confessor,<sup>40</sup> and it goes ultimately back to the Greek triad of νοῦς (rendered in Latin as *intellectus* or *animus* or *mens*) - λόγος/δύναμις (rendered in Latin as *ratio* or *virtus*) - διάνοια/ἐνέργεια (rendered as *sensus* or *operatio*). The first and highest motion is simple in its nature; it represents the soul's moving about the unknown God, although the soul does not thereby acquire knowledge of God in the sense of a positive grasp of his excellent nature. The second motion is that of human reason. Developing from the first motion of the intellect as if directly begotten by it, this motion of the soul defines the known God as the cause of all things; accordingly, the soul will comprehend the primordial causes that are eternally created in and by God. Through this motion the soul can to a certain degree know what God is, namely the cause of all things, and it is therefore responsible for imprinting this knowledge on itself, wherefore *ratio* is called a natural motion. The third motion is a composite one, whereby the soul receives the phantasies of things, which are communicated to it through the five

<sup>38</sup> We should note that, although Eriugena's more systematic anthropological discussions do not really start before Book IV, there is an important anthropological debate in Book II, where the author discusses Maximus the Confessor. See *Per.* II 529C-542C, Sh.-W.: 14-42.

<sup>39</sup> The following paragraph gives an account of *Per.* II 572C-579A, Sh.-W.: 106-120.

<sup>40</sup> See Maximus' *Ambig.* VI 3, PG 91, 1112D. See also Eriugena's translation: *Ambig. ad Ioh.* VI 3, 119-121: *Tres enim universales motus habere animam in unum collectos a caritate docuerunt, unum secundum animum, alterum secundum rationem, tertium secundum sensum.*

senses, and having ordered and judged them, brings them into harmony with itself. The knowledge which was one in the intellect contemplating God, and which was still passed on as one through reason, contemplating God as the universal cause and the eternal causes, becomes manifold in the third motion of the soul, where we find the dispersion of innumerable effects.

By focusing on the workings of the three motions of the soul, which are also found listed under the alternative names of essence, power and operation, Eriugena seems next to be induced further to dwell on the structural analogy between the trinity in the human soul and the divine Trinity. It was in the course of the drawn-out discussion concerning the latter that Eriugena returned to the problem of negative and affirmative theology, and it is almost at the end of his section on the kataphatic approach to God, which again involves the Trinity as a point of discussion, that we find the passage quoted above.

Summarizing the three motions of the human soul by representing them in their activities of *intelligere - cogitare - sermone proferre*, Eriugena creates in this passage the effect, willingly or unwillingly, of separating the human trinity radically from its divine paragon, whose being can never be reflected in either human speech or human thought. Enumerating the workings of the soul appears thus to be identical with exhaustively summing up the deficiencies of the human soul when it attempts to attain God. The being of the Trinity defies even the intellect as the highest human faculty and thereby naturally defeats the other motions of the soul as well. Yet this passage contains much more information, on the basis of which we can hope to reconstruct the position of the human soul and the opportunities still available to it for the attainment of the divine.

From the structure of the hierarchical order of the human soul, which is subordinate to the divine being in all its aspects, it becomes entirely clear that in Eriugena's view expression in speech is ranked last behind the activities of reason or intellect. It rather seems as if the externalization which takes place in the process of predication disturbs and breaks up the unity of God as the object of true contemplation.<sup>41</sup> But speech, reason or intellect are all alike inadequate for the representation of the divine essence. This clearly indicates the urgent necessity for the divine nature to make up through self-manifestation what human endeavour, even in its most exalted and purest form, cannot provide. The actual reason for the

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<sup>41</sup> It is important to notice how Eriugena in Book I, when he has exploited all possibilities of predication through positive and negative theology, leaves only one possibility undestroyed, simply to praise God. See *Per.* I 522B, Sh.-W.: 216: ....*deinde super omne quod de eo predicatur superessentialis natura quae omnia creat et non creatur superessentialiter superlaudanda est.*

inadequacy of human predication is the finiteness inherent in its created character. Human reasoning, human predication poses an end to contemplation where there is none, and in this it discloses a deceptive character, moving away from or concealing the truth rather than approaching and representing it. In fact, the branches of apophatic and kataphatic theology have not succeeded in securing the direct communication between *creator* and *creatura*, since they underlined the transcendence of the divine nature in a degree proportional to the clarification of human understanding. Neither has the revelatory combination of affirmation and denial in the predication of words like *superessentialis* achieved such a result. Human contemplation will never be capable of attaining the truth as such. This can only be procured by the divine nature itself. The highest accomplishment imaginable is the grasp of mere vestiges of this unattainable divine truth, which Eriugena decides to call its theophanies.

Theophanies do not coincide with the truth itself, which in its highest form transcends all understanding, but they give a fair representation of both the Trinity and the unity of God as the necessary basis on which God is to receive proper praise and benediction. One should indeed pay close attention to this concept of theophany in Eriugena's speculations, because it seems to arrive at the goal which proved beyond reach for both negative and affirmative theology. Through theophany a new set of metaphors is coined to replace the Divine Names as legitimate predications of the divine.

### 2.3. *The Road from God to Creation. The Metaphorical Approach*

#### A. *Theophany*

Eriugena first mentions the so-called theophanies in Book I of the *Periphyseon*. Immediately after he has dealt with the first division of nature into being and non-being, and the second division into four forms, and has besides expounded the five modes of interpretation pertaining to the former, he broaches this new topic. In considering the question, brought up by the Student on the basis of his reading of Augustine, of whether the angels can view the primordial causes in God, the Master claims that what are referred to here are in fact not the eternal reasons themselves, but their theophanies. These he subsequently describes as divine apparitions that are comprehensible to the intellectual nature: *comprehensibiles intellectuali naturae quasdam divinas apparitiones* (*Per.* I 446C, Sh.-W.: 46). Eriugena's aim here is obviously to attempt to reconcile the opinion, quoted as Augustine's,<sup>42</sup> that the angelic nature was established before every other creature, not in time but in dignity, and can therefore directly behold the

<sup>42</sup> See *Per.* I, Sh.-W.: 44, where the editor says that this opinion of Augustine's is not

eternal reasons in God, with statements of St. Paul, e.g. Rom. 11:54 (*quis intellectum Domini cognovit?*) and Phil. 4:7 (*pax Christi quae exsuperat omnem intellectum*), which irrefutably deny the possibility of direct knowledge of God. His solution lies in the introduction of a middle term: *theophania*.<sup>43</sup>

Through claiming the existence of theophanies, circumscribed as *dei apparitiones*, the author posits God's self-manifestation as an intermediate level between his inaccessible nature on the one hand,<sup>44</sup> and the highest intellectual creatures, i.e. the angels as representatives of created nature, on the other. We are apparently dealing here with God in the form in which he reveals himself to intellectual or rational creatures, according to the capacity of each.<sup>45</sup> To a large extent therefore, theophanies are tailored to the intellectual level of their recipients -the multitude of angels and the whole of mankind-, since these are the sole possessors of a rational and intellectual nature. In the author's view theophanies cannot simply be dismissed as mental constructs alone, thereby sharing the artificiality of the superlative predication discussed before.<sup>46</sup> They frequently occur in Scripture, for instance. Among these scriptural theophanies Eriugena especially refers to the anthropomorphic description of God in phrases like *vidi dominum sedentem*.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever their purpose may be, something we have yet to discover in this chapter, we should at any rate notice how the introduction of theophanies implies a radical inversion of the direction of Eriugena's reasoning. Whereas the divine impalpability was the central issue in negative theology, now it has apparently receded into the background as the concrete manifestation of God is mooted, suggesting the possibility of understanding and expression in speech. A remarkable feature inherent in all theophanies and an unexpected consequence of their orientation towards rational understanding (whether human or angelic), is that their very exis-

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found in the *De Gen. ad litt.* which the Student claims to be his source. Madec 1988: 75–76 throws more light on this reference to Augustine. From *De praed.* IX, 154–159 it appears that Eriugena knew Augustine's four modes of priority, such as *ante temporis* and *ante dignitatis* (*Conf.* XII, 29,40). The angels' priority over creation is of the latter type, since according to Augustine they knew the whole of creation first in God (*De Gen. ad litt.* IV, 24,41).

<sup>43</sup> Eriugena clearly sees the use of the term 'theophany' as a middle course. See *Per.* I 446B, Sh.-W.: 46: N...ac per hoc necessarium est nos rectam mediamque viam tenere ne vel Apostolo videamur resistere vel sententiam summae ac sanctae auctoritatis magistri non obtinere.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Per.* I 447B, Sh.-W.: 48: A...praedictis enim rationibus confectum est divinam essentiam nulli intellectuali creaturae comprehensibilem esse...

<sup>45</sup> *Per.* I 446C-D, Sh.-W.: 46: Not only the divine essence is called God, but also ...modus ille quo se quodam modo intellectuali et rationali creaturae prout est capacitas uniuscuiusque ostendit deus saepe a sancta scriptura vocitatur.

<sup>46</sup> For we are dealing here with the way in which God wants to reveal himself to creation and not with an attempt of human reason to cover the divine essence through its own predication. Scripture can therefore be a model for theophany. See Dietrich and Duclos 1986: 47.

<sup>47</sup> *Per.* I 446D, Sh.-W.: 46; cf. Isa. 6:1 (I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne...).

tence seems to bring about a distinction in the divine nature itself. Theophanies separate God's self-manifestation from his true and inaccessible self. Such a distinction is indicated by Eriugena's claim, which is in fact only a mere reassertion of the results of the first *divisio*, that those things that can be understood by reason and intellect are rightfully said to be, whereas the divine nature ultimately should be declared not to be. To put it in the terms of the *Periphyseon*'s prologue: theophanies are, whereas the divine nature ultimately is not. Should theophanies in their capacity of outward appearances of the divine therefore be ranked on the level of kataphatic theology, expressing the metaphorical distance of predications *velut proprie*, as they veil the true nature of God from the clear sight of its beholder? As yet it is not clear whether theophanies should be distinguished from other predications of God at all, for not even with the help of God's self-manifestation, which was most truly preserved in words like *superessentialis*, could the divine nature be adequately revealed and communicated to rational creatures through the flexible medium of human language.

The ambiguous discrepancy between God's self-manifestation to creation through theophany and his actual nature -previously called the divine nakedness- obviously strikes the Student as a point of major concern. He presents it as an eschatological problem that needs to be solved. His objection to theophany from an eschatological point of view is based on the biblical dictum that now we see God in a mirror and obscurely, but then we shall perceive him face to face through the beatific vision which saints enjoy at the end of times (1 Cor.13:12: *Nunc videmus per speculum in enigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*). If the Master stands by his statement that we can never contemplate God directly, what then does that imply for this future happiness? The Student accordingly wishes to know more about the divine contemplation that is promised to the saints.

The Master summarizes their previous agreement on the issue of the beatific vision by resorting again to theophany. He thus implicitly hints at a near solution of the pupil's question, eliciting his repeated judgement that not only the divine essence can be named God, but that theophanies may be predicated by this name as well.<sup>48</sup> Theophanies signify a movement of divine descent to the level of human predication, in which there is still a full preservation of the divine transcendence. The mode of divine contemplation is thus that of human predication directed by the self-manifestation of the divine, without ever compromising God's overall inaccessibility to human understanding. A striking convergence of divine transcendence and divine immanence becomes feasible for the human mind through theophany. Through the concurrence of divine presence

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<sup>48</sup> *Per.* I 448A-B, Sh.-W.: 50.

and distance in the notion of theophany God coercively guides man's rational investigation while retaining his divine freedom of movement. The measure in which theophanies are bestowed on men and the angels is determined ultimately by divine grace, which is therefore the organizing force behind the different levels of understanding occupied by the saints.<sup>49</sup>

Not only the divine self-manifestation, but also the possibility of its predication in human language relies entirely on God, who by descending to an intermediate level halfway between transcendence and immanence seems to radiate all the more his inaccessible light. At the same time creation appears to be lifted to a level where it can directly communicate with God, as if the divine nature has now completely accepted and surrounded it. Accordingly, the Master refers to theophanies as the mansions in the divine house (John 14: 2),<sup>50</sup> emphasizing that their divine character effectively tinges created nature. Thus through theophany there arises a reciprocity between *creator* and *creatura*, the exact nature of which needs yet to be defined.

The Student wants to know still more about his Master's idea of theophany, and the Master, admitting that this is indeed an item of profound human inquiry, proceeds by quoting from tradition, selecting Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor and Augustine. From Maximus' commentary on Gregory's homilies it becomes clear that theophanies involve active participation on the part of creation as well as on the part of God's self-manifestation.<sup>51</sup> The descent of God towards creation is effectively balanced by the ascent of man, inasmuch as he becomes purified by the Divine Word, the only begotten Son of God. It is through this double-sided movement, in which the divine grace is met by human love, that theophany arises:

M. So from this condescension of divine wisdom to human nature through grace, and from the elevation of the same nature to that same wisdom through love, there arises theophany. (*Per.* I 449B, Sh.-W.: 52)

In this process theophany can be seen to demonstrate moral qualities as well as intellectual aspects. Therefore it is called a virtue,<sup>52</sup> as it is

<sup>49</sup> See *Per.* I 448C-D, Sh.-W.: 50-52. As for the role of grace, the Master says: *Nam unusquisque ut diximus unigeniti dei verbi notitiam in se ipso possidebit quantum ei gratia donabitur.*

<sup>50</sup> The Master refers to theophanies as 'the many mansions in God's house' (John 14:2), hinting thereby at their individuality and differentiation. *Quot enim numerus est electorum tot erit numerus mansionum; quanta fuerit sanctorum animarum multiplicatio tanta erit divinarum theophaniarum possessio* (*Per.* I 448C-D, Sh.-W.: 52).

<sup>51</sup> The attribution of these statements to Maximus is uncertain. In his edition of the *Ambig. ad Ioh.* Jeuneau suggests PG 91, 1084B-C, 1113B and 1385B-C.

<sup>52</sup> *Per.* I 449C, Sh.-W.: 54: *Igitur omnis theophania, id est omnis virtus...*



received internally on the sole basis of this double movement, consisting in the descent of God and the ascent of human or angelic nature. It is through this dynamic or virtuous aspect that theophany finally leads up to a complete union between God and man, so that man while retaining his human qualities can yet be called God through a process of deification.<sup>53</sup> Eriugena borrows from Maximus an illustrative comparison. He draws on the optical illusion that makes air illuminated by the sun appear to be nothing else but light, although it does not lose its proper physical qualities.<sup>54</sup> In a like manner human nature seems to be assimilated with God. As if through a divine 'trompe-l'oeil' its divine quality appears to be its only reality, although the original humanity remains intact.

While the air thus radiates the light of the sun, so the sunlight is made visible only through its substantialization in air, to the extent that not only its passive perceptibility but also its active manifestation exclusively depends on it. In this manner Eriugena sharpens Maximus' comparison when he states:

M. And from this you should understand that the divine essence is in itself incomprehensible, but when joined to an intellectual creature in some miraculous manner it becomes manifest so that the one, I mean the divine essence, is alone visible in the other, namely the intellectual creature. For the excellence of this ineffable one transcends every nature that participates in it, so that in all things nothing else but [the divine essence] itself is revealed to those who understand, while in itself, as we have said, it is in no way manifest. (*Per.* I 450B, Sh.-W.: 54-56)

The special position of that part of creation which is endowed with reason and intellect, i.e. human and angelic nature, makes the divine nature dependent on created nature, so to speak, for the demonstration of its true nature. The *veluti proprie* of kataphatic theology, which seems to impair the power of expression of theophanic representations of God, hinders human nature from getting a clear sight of the divine nature. Yet ultimately it provides the only means of expression for the divine essence itself, thus overcoming virtually all the obstacles that previously blocked the way of direct communication. The *veluti proprie*, in other words, is the only acceptable level on which *creator* and *creatura* stand up to each other on the basis of equivalence or even equality. In my view it is to this level that Eriugena aspires in his rational investigation, and it is this level that will be directly accessible for the saints who enjoy the beatific vision in the afterlife through ultimately sharing in divine happiness. In consequence

<sup>53</sup> See *Per.* I 449B, Sh.-W.: 52, where Eriugena mentions *deificatio* or *theosis* as an anthropological possibility. It is not identical with Christ's Incarnation.

<sup>54</sup> *Per.* I 450A, Sh.-W.: 54. This same comparison can be found in Book V 879A; 987C. Cf. Maximus' *Ambig.*, PG 91, 1137C, 1140C.

of this apparent success, the textual notion of *veluti proprie*, which ultimately defies and replaces the approaches through kataphatic and apophatic theology because of the implied distance between God and creation, ought to be interpreted here as a dynamic principle, providing the only tangent plane between the two. It allows creation to extend beyond its preset limitations and gives God the uncompromised opportunity to make himself comprehensible.

Eriugena's examples of theophanic appearances should therefore be analyzed against the specific background of theophany as a creative meeting-place of God and creation. We will then see that Eriugena's use of theophany, though reflecting a crude dialectical logic, subtly exploits all aspects of the dynamic principle of *veluti proprie*. Concerning e.g. certain biblical quotations hinting at a divine omnipresence (1 Cor. 15:28: *Erit enim deus omnia in omnibus, ac si aperte scriptura diceret: Solus deus apparebit in omnibus*)<sup>55</sup> Eriugena develops quite unusual views, which seem to point in a pantheistic direction since they appear to be completely void of any orientation. The pinnacle of this lack of orientation is an overriding inversion of the hierarchical order of cause and effect in a passage in Book III of the *Periphyseon*. Stretching his reasoning ability to the utmost in order to deal with the concept of *nihil* in an attempt to harmonize its negative character with God's omnipotence, Eriugena makes the following statement:

But if creation is from God, then God will be the cause, but creation the effect. Yet if an effect is nothing else but a made cause, it follows that God is made the cause in his effects. (*Per.* III 687C, Sh.-W.: 182)

Instead of God creating the world in his capacity of being its eternal cause, it is God who becomes created here through his effects. Eriugena thus appears completely to overturn the logical order of events as he comes to make creation almost responsible for God's unfolding as its cause.

Yet what might be regarded here as a pantheistic theory run out of control, should not in fact be too surprising when one is familiar with the elementary presuppositions of Eriugenian reasoning. For what we are dealing with here is nothing else but the remarkable effect of the divine 'trompe-l'oeil', the *veluti proprie*. Its consequences are so rigidly applied by the author that God appears to be able completely to obliterate himself, to the point of getting fully absorbed by created nature.<sup>56</sup> But the distance which is so forcefully embodied and preserved in the *veluti proprie*-character of theophany will prevent God and creation ever coinciding

<sup>55</sup> *Per.* I 450D, Sh.-W.: 56.

<sup>56</sup> Thus, what we have here is in fact exactly the opposite of the passage in *Per.* II 528B, Sh.-W.: 12, where creation disappeared in God. See above ch. 1.2.

completely, for every coincidence will be retracted ultimately by the same dynamism that brought it about. Through the implied indirectness of theophany in its character of *veluti proprie*, predications of God can in fact now take on every hue on the spectrum of universal nature. While theophany by its very nature reveres God in his character of structural 'elusiveness', its aspect of divine apparition vouchsafes a remarkable exactness for human predication by endowing it with a certain freedom of movement ultimately governed by divine self-manifestation.

Human predication profits from this by gaining the ability continuously to assure itself of divine consent; it can sanction beforehand whatever method of expression it resorts to. Unlike the negative approach to God, theophany allows everything within the scope of infinite *natura* to function as a legitimate and accurate representation of the divine. The problem of predicative appropriateness previously dominating the question of approaching and describing God now disappears, as human predication is declared perfectly suitable to follow the course of God's unfolding into creation.<sup>57</sup> This will result in an analysis of the return of the multiple effects to God's indivisible oneness by the same movement. Theophanies are in fact not to be distinguished from God, at least in so far as the divine nature allows that they are called God. In this manner the range of influence inherent in theophany spans the whole of nature from its very beginning in God as *ἀναρχος*<sup>58</sup> to its very end in God as the receptacle in which all things will reside eternally.

By approaching *natura* from an indirect point of view, that is through the veil of *veluti proprie*, Eriugena has found a way to investigate nature on the basis of its inherent expansiveness, while at the same time he has assured himself of God's approval by making the divine self-manifestation his ultimate frame of reference. Thus in theophany it happens that God, while retaining his character as the cause from which all things flow forth, becomes in fact the object of his effects, for it is only through and in relation to the effects that their cause can actually be identified as cause. Referring to the earlier conclusion that the model of cause and effect merely functions as an auxiliary visualization of the relationship between *creator* and *creatura*,<sup>59</sup> we should now return to this same Eriugenian expedient in order to come closer to the actual purport of theophany. What I want to suggest here is that what holds true for God as the cause of all things

<sup>57</sup> For in fact there is no criterion by which to distinguish between theophanies and God's true nature. God authorizes his appearances because he wants to reveal himself through theophany. Thus he allows himself to be understood. See *Per.* I 446D, Sh.-W.: 46.

<sup>58</sup> After the discussion of theophanies Eriugena embarks on a discussion of God as the Cause of all things, the first form of nature, which is without beginning. See *Per.* I 451C-D, Sh.-W.: 58).

<sup>59</sup> See ch.1.3 above.

should also apply to God as the *finis* or end of all things, the underlying essences of the first and the fourth species being completely identical. Thus it is through the effects which God causes that he also becomes the end of all things; in other words, it appears that, through the effects, not only the process of creation but also the process of return is initiated and carried out. This is in fundamental accordance with Eriugena's eschatology, which can never reach beyond the stage of theophany, but which in and through theophany seems to have almost immediate access to and communication with the divine. Yet all the while God remains in himself intrinsically inaccessible.<sup>60</sup>

Theophany, whether it reveals God as the cause of all things or God as the end, always reflects the fundamental association of creation and creator, whereby the divine element forms the centre of its dynamic gravity, lowering itself to the standards of its unequal counterpart, i.e. the begotten world. Thus the notion of theophany provides the perspective with which Eriugena analyzes the concept of *natura* embracing both God and creation. Through this notion it is possible for Eriugena to transcend traditional boundaries, for in theophany God can be portrayed accurately as being in a created state, whereas creation can unexpectedly take on the dimensions of creative nature.<sup>61</sup> Being ultimately nothing but divine self-manifestation, the notion of theophany results in viewing nature as the embodiment of God, who through and opposite creation unfolds himself by pouring forth a continuous flow of inexhaustible riches. The inexhaustibility of the concept of theophany is typical of many of its aspects, because the overall characterization of *veluti proprie* makes its application as wide-ranging as the undefinable boundaries of *natura* itself, while the dividing-line between God and creation forming its fundamental elements is at all times freely crossed. But whereas *natura* functions as the all-embracing term which Eriugena employs to encompass the entities of God and creation, all the while leaving an actual definition aside, the concept of theophany starts out from the opposite direction. Here it is not the philosopher reaching out for infinity, but the divine inaccessibility compromising itself to be grasped by human understanding. But the predominant authority of the divine is safeguarded, because the initiative remains with God, who generously allows himself to be predicated in human speech. Thus there are two dominant perspectives from which Eriugena undertakes to analyze the totality of all things: from the point of

<sup>60</sup> Note that Eriugena quotes 1 Tim. 6:16 in the particular context of his dealing with theophany, *Per.* I 448C, Sh.-W.: 50.

<sup>61</sup> *Per.* III 681A, Sh.-W.: 166: ...*omnis visibilis et invisibilis creatura theophania, id est divina apparitio, potest appellari.*

view of man's reasoning faculty in *natura* and from the point of view of God in theophany.

During Eriugena's *rationabilis investigatio* in the *Periphyseon* there finally arises a sort of effective harmony, since it is against the background of Eriugena's continuing search that theophany and *natura* need to establish an intricate balance. The dominant influence lies undoubtedly with the divine nature, which sanctions its very representation in thought and speech. In this, theophany reaches much further than the images produced by kataphatic theology. Through theophany God not only condones his expression in human language, but ultimately seems to generate it. It is in this sense that the introduction of theophany substantially contributes to the atmosphere of infinity which marks Eriugena's initial description of *natura*, for it not only enables him to incorporate God into it alongside creation, but it ultimately allows him to treat them both in a completely equal manner. Through the condescension of God's omnipotence, creation is elevated to a level where there is freedom of transition between the realm of God and the realm of creation, though without confusion.

The concept of theophany may be said to form the divine justification for the feat of divine infinity embodied in Eriugena's introduction of *natura* and his exposition of its consecutive divisions. Through the employment of theophany he increases the validity and effectivity of the intrinsic rationalism of nature's divisions on the point of exactitude and authority, but he ultimately rolls back the monopoly on this rationalism behind the diffusing screen of the *veluti proprie*. This means that there will always remain an element of ambiguity in the author's rational arguments, for where divine authority differs from the author's interest is not discernible, because the 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' of his search completely coincide. To solve this ambiguity I want to propose the following approach for the evaluation of the *Periphyseon*, prompted by the idea that only the text can clarify the various problems that need to be solved. For it is after all as an author that Eriugena has introduced the idea of theophany in the same manner as he has decided to apply himself to negative theology. His adherence to the principle of rationality, his loyalty to the scheme of dialectics, should consequently be seen as being ultimately nothing more than the sanctioned perspective from which he voluntarily chooses to investigate the *universitas omnium rerum*, its validity within the bounds of the *Periphyseon* being absolute for both God and creation. The radicality of Eriugena's perspective must therefore be seen as rooted not only in the employment of rational criteria as such, which may be arbitrary especially because of the unusual divine approval it has acquired, but in his conscious application and explication thereof as one choice among many, yet

a choice which he will pursue to the very end.

It is his commitment to a *rationabilis investigatio* as a result of a free orientation that determines the path to his final goal i.e. God, who through theophany has been incorporated in his view of nature on equal terms with the other objects figuring in his search. The description of his rationality as a matter of perspective should make us all the more aware of his employment of it during the development of the *Periphyseon*, in which it is undoubtedly the dominant feature. Yet at the same time and for the same reasons it ultimately bestows Eriugena's enterprise with the character of relativity. This relativity springs from the interpretation of Eriugena's rationality as merely a matter of perspective. Despite its intrinsic connection with *natura* to the point of forming its final constitutive principle, rationality is not inherent in the nature of the things under examination. Rather, it will always be the operating instrument innate in the theologian and philosopher who undertakes the investigation, no matter how much he will include his own position among the objects that make up the all-embracing concept of *natura*. Apart from this matter of perspective there is ultimately no distinction between the road from creation to God and the road from God to creation, nature and theophany in the last analysis being completely synonymous.

Yet if one wants to decide on the centre of gravity anchoring Eriugena's concept of nature, one cannot dismiss this question by stating that it is the reasoning faculty of man which functions as such, because its connection with the divine element prevents such simplifications. As we have seen in our analysis of negative and affirmative theology, human predication has failed in disclosing the true essence of the divine nature. Its boundaries are reached in the terminology which Eriugena designed to proclaim the divine nature in an appropriate manner. Words like *superessentialis* and *plus-quam-veritas* overstretch the possibilities of human predication, converting theological language into a void which loses its grip on the created world, while it cannot fully grasp the dimensions of the divine. Only in the *velut proprie* of kataphatic theology can we catch an incomplete and therefore distorted glimpse of God. The reason for its innate deficiency is that the precision with which negative theology stripped off all meaning seems to be completely lacking in the kataphatic metaphor.

Having ruled out the definite accuracy of human speech, Eriugena turns to the concept of theophany, thereby fundamentally anchoring his investigation in the self-manifestation of the divine. It is here that *natura* receives its final interpretation and in fact also its only true and essential (οὐσιώδης) definition, namely as theophany in the fullest and most perfect sense. *Natura*, ranging from God through the angels, man and all of creation unto the lowest element of unformed matter is ultimately nothing

but theophany. Yet by proclaiming *natura* as theophany we assert that ultimately it is God in whom the whole concept of *natura* is rooted. For it is his self-manifestation that sets the boundaries to *natura*, thus establishing its all-embracing and infinite character.

### *B. Conclusions and Consequences*

The final identification of *natura* as theophany has wide-ranging consequences for Eriugena's rational investigation, which will here be enumerated briefly. We have already pointed out the final relativity of Eriugena's rationalism, firmly embedded in the self-manifestation of God as its ultimate frame of reference. However, our remarks were in no way meant to lessen the importance and effectiveness of Eriugena's rationalism. It remains at all times throughout his search the key instrument with which he approaches and opens up all areas of *natura*. Consequently, the basic affinity between ontology and intelligibility which could be traced in the opening divisions of the *Periphyseon* holds equally true for the rest of the work, as it continues to stamp Eriugena's on-going search much in the same way as was initially laid down in the first division of nature. Being is linked with the state of being understood by the mind while non-being refers to that which transcends the mind's grasp, for Eriugena chooses to consider no other interpretations of non-being than the stated *non esse per excellentiam suae naturae*. Although from the point of view of the human *animus* this exempts God from the mind's effective grasp, he is nevertheless incorporated in the ultimate understanding of *natura*, even if his position is singled out by logical opposition. This inversion of being, however, by no means infringes on the fundamental alliance in Eriugena's work between the modes of thinking and the modes of being. It merely reflects his strategy as to how to proceed when undertaking the audacious enterprise of reuniting God and creation.

This reunion can only take place successfully at the level of theophany, where all of nature is regarded as the self-manifestation of the divine. Thus all the limitations of human predication are overcome, as it surrenders to the higher authority of the divine. Yet by this outward act of defeat, by his subtle manoeuvring with the deficiencies inherent in a created state, Eriugena manages to place the final initiative definitively on his side. Therefore, it is from the perspective of theophany that we must ultimately evaluate the extent of Eriugena's rationalism, provided its basic premise of the affinity between ontology and intelligibility is left intact. But the concordance between being and being comprehended need not be too radically applied, since after all it is the divine 'trompe-l'oeil' of Eriugena's concept of theophany that tinges both *esse* and *comprehendi*.

It is therefore only with regard to its final ground in the divine omnipotence that we can explain Eriugena's rationalism, as it is essentially conditioned by the divine volition to be accessible to creation. While creation can thus successfully reach out for God, it is by its own powers that it achieves this balance between creative and created nature. The 'trompe-l'oeil' which intrinsically characterizes Eriugena's notion of theophany, not only hides God from human sight by disguising his real nature, but conversely it also hides Eriugena's rationalism from a clear interpretation since any linear view is bound to break down when confronted with the clouding concept of *theophania* in which it is shrouded.

Ultimately therefore, the concept of theophany must determine the nature of Eriugena's rationalism. It enables the occurrence of parallellisms between modes of being and modes of thinking, while at the same time undermining and corroding their final effectiveness. For they are unable to grasp the complete essence of the divine nature, which turns out to be their absolute vanishing-point. When setting out to establish the true purport of Eriugena's *rationabilis investigatio*, either in general or, as in this case, with special regard to his anthropology, one should be constantly aware of the drifting character of Eriugena's reasoning, as it moves between the two extremes that are responsible for its final balance: *natura* as its point of departure in created nature, *theophania* as its receding horizon in God. Eriugena's rationalism, the continuous affinity between ontology and intelligibility, thus sets off to explore through theophany all areas of *natura*, in order finally to restore the unity of creation with God.

In both the concepts of *natura* and *theophania* Eriugena's rationalism has in a sense already anticipated this final reunion, for in both concepts his reasoning freely commands both creation and creator. Although their opposition at times seems to affect his portrayal of the universe, on the whole the effect is no more than a momentary one, both *creator* and *creatura* being mere stages in a dialectical process striving for the unbroken, definitive unity that reflects the oneness from which the multiplicity of creation has originally sprouted forth. The opposition between *non esse* and *esse* in the first division of nature, representing the dichotomy between *creator* and *creatura* in terms of their possible understanding by the human mind, is therefore never a static one, but a matter of perspective with a variable character, as there are other modes of being and non-being dividing the universality of *natura* in quite a different manner. In the fourfold division of nature Eriugena's tolerant acceptance of the traditional distinction is even more remarkable, despite its repudiation on the surface of the text. All four parts of nature consist of both a creative and a created aspect, which emphasizes their equality, so revealing the irrelevance of their position with regard to the course of *natura*'s final unfolding. In this division



it is the succession of the stages, their unfolding according to nature's *ordo* which constitutes their importance. The ruling principle of this development is the dynamic interplay of *divisio* and *analysis*. The philosophy of perspective which is inaugurated in the first division with its various interpretive modes thus becomes a philosophy of dialectical development in the fourfold division. Their connection continues to be the operational principle of Eriugena's *ratio*, which finds its first and highest expression in the characteristic alliance between ontology and intelligibility. This basic affinity lies at the basis of the two divisions of nature, providing Eriugena's rational investigation with elementary tenets through which he advances in his search, and it still remains in force when the concept of theophany alters his view of *natura*. The distinction between *creator* and *creatura* seems to have lost fundamental importance, for it is *natura* that has to be led back to God, in anticipation of which Eriugena considers it under the divine perspective of theophany.

Because he has overthrown the traditional dichotomy of *creatura* and *creator*, Eriugena is able to constitute a new concept of *natura*, whose all-embracing character is not marred by preset distinctions. He thus establishes various divisions without doing damage to the universality of *natura*, the completeness of which can always be retrieved underneath the different modes of interpretation or methods of approach applied to it. In the concept of theophany this universal character of *natura* is heightened and intensified, as it becomes integrated with and absorbed by the completeness of the divine nature. However, Eriugena seeks eventually to reduce the universal multiplicity of *natura*, the infinite character of which he has stressed repeatedly, to the oneness of the divine nature. Although the static dichotomy between *creator* and *creatura* has merged in the multi-dimensional character of *natura*, being elevated beyond human distinctions in theophany, it is Eriugena's ultimate purpose to annihilate the generality of his original concept and make the universe find its eternal rest in one, indivisible God. As we have seen from his second division of *natura*, Eriugena proceeds through a dialectical process of division and return. God unfolds himself in creation, and creation will ultimately return to God by the very same stages of its explication.

Given the basic affinity between modes of thinking and modes of being, these dialectical stages of division and analysis also reflect the fundamental ontological structure of the Eriugenian universe. In this respect Eriugena's method closely resembles the Neoplatonic way of thinking, in which the hierarchy of being coincides with a structure of increasingly intellectual levels.<sup>62</sup> Although Eriugena does not strictly separate between

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. for example Proclus' *Theol. Plat.* IV, (chs. 1-3) where he discusses the position

the different hierarchical levels (considering the second mode of interpretation of the first division, they are of relative validity), he nevertheless endorses a view of the universe that is similarly pervaded by the interdependence of ontology and intelligibility, albeit in a more general manner. This interdependence seems to be functioning more as an operative principle that determines his perspective than as the hierarchical structure of a definitive order of the universe. Another organizing principle equally present in Neoplatonic philosophy commands the development of Eriugena's rational investigation, namely the dynamic pair of *processio* and *reditus*. As was made clear in the analysis of the fourfold division of nature, Eriugena used a rational scheme to sketch the unfolding of creation from God and its subsequent return to God. This rational or rather, dialectical scheme of division and analysis, which we illustrated by means of a passage from the *De praedestinatione*, organizes and regulates Eriugena's modes of thinking, to which the interchangeable forms of nature are ultimately subordinate. Yet, on the basis of the interrelation of ontology and intelligibility, the forms of thinking can be seen to have accurate representation in real existence, thus converting the development of Eriugena's rational investigation into a similarly arrayed ontological process. In other words, the dynamic rationality of *divisio* and *analysis* is matched by the ontological development of *processio* and *reditus* in the same dialectical manner. As yet the precise relationship between these two dialectical pairs has not been established.

From the point of view of Eriugena's rational investigation the rational movement seems to prevail, since it is only through the dialectical organization of his thought that Eriugena can carry out his search, establishing varying divisions of nature so that they are intrinsically prior even to the assessment of *natura* itself. Yet the entities which Eriugena examines in his rational investigation, notably God and creation, affect the course of his investigation thoroughly. Although reason is the starting-point for the *Periphyseon* with regard to its subject, it is God as the final objective of its progressive evolution who influences and even determines the line of reasoning that Eriugena will follow. For *natura* is ultimately reducible to theophany. Therefore, whatever reasoning perspective Eriugena takes, it will always be dominated by the divine presence which defines its character as that of theophany. Moreover, this aspect of theophany may ultimately still hide its true purport, so that in the final analysis the concept originally shaped by Eriugena's reasoning could yet successfully escape its grasp.

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of the Gods who are both νοητός and νοερός, as they form a necessary, intermediate level between the Gods who are only νοητός or only νοερός. All through the *Theol. Plat.* Proclus posits such triadic divisions, thus in fact fragmenting the universe as a whole.

Instead of the two realms of God and creation, of which the universe consists according to most early Christian and medieval theologians, Eriugena presents one unbroken concept of *natura*, of which the adjectives 'creative' or 'created' present interchangeable aspects, but which is in the last analysis put forward in theophany as an integrated, essentially divine whole. The dominating factor in *natura* is *ratio*, in theophany it is God. These concepts of nature and theophany stamp the *Periphyseon*'s search until Eriugena has completed his task of leading all of *natura* back to one, indivisible God and thereby rendered the use of theophany redundant. Eriugena's mission in this respect is not a mere anticipation of the eschatological status in which the saints will share after death. In fact, it will even transcend this eternal state of happiness. For whereas the eschatological joy of the beatific vision refers only to a theophanic vision of God, thus remaining well within the bounds of *natura* of which after all *humana natura* forms an important part, Eriugena's final purpose in the *Periphyseon* appears to be different. By intending the complete absorption of *natura* in God he aspires after the ultimate dissolution of his own reasoning, which will eventually also have to merge with the indivisible One.

As a consequence this implies the irrevocable disqualification of theophany, for because of its integrated function in Eriugena's *rationabilis investigatio*, which becomes extended even to the level of eschatology, it must remain closely linked with the notion of *natura*. It will always be the divine guise of this concept and thus it cannot properly be predicated as the final objective of its development. For theophany, by definition the appearance of God, can never be equated with his indivisible simple nature, a side-effect which I have attempted to clarify by calling theophany Eriugena's use of a divine 'trompe-l'oeil'. The real counterpart of *natura* as the all-embracing concept of the universe from which Eriugena starts his search in the *Periphyseon* cannot be a theophany, but can only be God in his true essence, indivisibility being his most outstanding feature. Thus Eriugena's purpose in the *Periphyseon* of a reunion between God and creation, or, in his terms, between universal *natura* and the indivisible divine essence, transcends even such eschatological patterns as have the support of biblical authority, making his endeavour all the more audacious. It seems to be bound by no restraint at all.

It is tempting to interpret this undertaking as a bold, if not crude form of pantheism, and the accusation of pantheism has indeed often been made as the outcome of an incomplete and unbalanced analysis of Eriugena's thought.<sup>63</sup> For a number of reasons, however, such an accusation

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* by Pope Honorius III in 1225 because it was associated with the pantheistic doctrines of Amalric of Bene (died 1207). In 1684 Gale's printed edition of the *Periphyseon* was put on the Index.

clearly seems to indicate a severe misinterpretation of the essentials of Eriugena's philosophy. First of all, the suggestion of pantheism entails the implicit allegation of a lack of exactitude. If God is all in all, how can there be a distinction between *creator* and *creatura*? Eriugena does not perpetrate such an act of negligent recklessness. Whenever he traces God in created nature, it is a theophany that we encounter and the true divine nature remains reverently untouched. Yet, as we have attempted to clarify in the discussion of theophany, God is unmistakably and ubiquitously present in this concept, thus in a sense compensating for the elusiveness of his true nature by his obvious domination through theophany. The guise of theophany prevents Eriugena from rashly equating creative and created nature, for even in his boldest assertions the true divine nature cannot be detected. Moreover, Eriugena's philosophical speculations in the *Periphyseon* are very much a matter of perspective, the organizing features being the movement of *processio* and *reditus* which at all times determine the emphasis of its argumentation. Therefore, it is nowhere possible to separate the position attributed to God from the actual stage of development of Eriugena's ratiocination, the evasive character of which makes it highly unlikely that Eriugena should stick exclusively to one particular view of the universe, so as to dispense with other modes of interpretation.

Secondly, the allegation of pantheism must be refuted for not taking account of the historical, i.e. non-recurring, character of Eriugena's philosophy. *Processio* and *reditus*, apart from being the guiding principles of Eriugena's reasoning, reflect the natural unfolding of the universe as a unique process that takes place in history. Thus the dynamism enabling the continuous shifts of emphasis in Eriugena's philosophy, often mistaken for a reckless form of pantheism, is a unique process that brings the whole of *natura* back to God, as it is propelled by a progressive and linear development unlikely to be associated with the sheer revolving movement inherent in any concept of pantheism. Yet through theophany the historical line of development has been given a refined reinterpretation as a meaningful process with a rational character (which can be traced adequately by the human *animus* in its stages of procession and return), and a well-defined end *viz.* God. Those two dynamic principles clearly prevail in the *Periphyseon* and with this knowledge we have to turn to the specific topic of Eriugena's anthropology in order to analyze their immense bearing on the author's interpretation of man.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FROM PHYSIOLOGY TO ANTHROPOLOGY

#### *3.1. The Universe of Nature and its Dialectical Connotations*

##### *A. Negative Theology versus Theophany*

Hitherto the Eriugenian universe has been characterized as a dynamic one. Its framework is constituted by two divisions, both noticeably indicating the intrinsic connection between ontology and intelligibility that is latently present everywhere in Eriugena's description and interpretation of *natura*. We have noticed how within nature's totality there still can be traced a distinction between God and creation. Yet in the end their dividing-line cannot but be of transitory importance, since their common frame of reference, i.e. universal nature, presupposes and safeguards free communication in every direction. Despite the separate status of both God and creation, the access to the unity of *natura*, which after all comprises them both, is at all times guaranteed. *Natura* stands for their interrelation as much as for the coordinating whole.

When we try to establish nature's ultimate character, the momentum of the divine element must definitely prevail. Characteristically representing a dynamic movement, *natura* embodies the process whereby God unfolds his essence into creation and in a final act withdraws again into his original simplicity. Whatever divergent aspects *natura* may have, not all of which are to be directly connected with God, it appears that the basic outline of the *Periphyseon*'s cosmos is always coloured with a diffuse, divine light.

As far as communication between God and creation goes, Eriugena's fundamental aim is undoubtedly to achieve a final 'union', as the one end to which all contemplation of *natura* should lead. The way of achieving this union appears to be essentially twofold, depending on the point of departure one wants to take. On the one hand there is the negative road leading from creation to God; on the other there is the theophanic road tracing the manifest apparition of the divine in creation. Both roads begin with and lead ultimately back to God as the inherent source of nature, thus preventing the universal whole from suffering fragmentation.

Starting from creation to reach out for the divine, Eriugena prefers to follow the so-called *via negativa*. His negative theology, which he considers at all times superior to its positive counterpart, culminates in the radical

conclusion that all definitive statements about God will eventually have to be denied. To describe God, who is the triadic beginning, middle and end of all things, one will ultimately have to go back to the realm of metaphorical imagery. Everything that is predicated of God, taken as it naturally is from creation, can only have indirect, that is transferable meaning. Qualifications drawing on the realm of creation can therefore never claim accurately to grasp the divine essence, which would surpass them by nature.

Contemplating the prospective attainment of God, Eriugena stresses the predominance of the negative way over every other form of theology.<sup>1</sup> He thus illustrates most emphatically the shortcomings of created language. Even if the astringent acuteness of downright negativity can seemingly be neutralized or perhaps even transcended by deploying such terms as *superessentialis* and *plus-quam-veritas*, the reductive effects of negativity remain unremittingly in force. Although the superlative language Eriugena resorts to may lack a negative form, as an inevitable result it also lacks positive power of expression. Moreover, though the outward appearance of these superlatives is kataphatic, Eriugena readily admits that their impact is unmistakably apophatic. Thus their ultimate position directs him back again to the field of negative theology.

Eriugena's method of instituting a new terminology proves to be a dead end. It does not take him any further in his attempt adequately to describe the divine, which forms the centre of gravity of *natura*. Realizing this he has recourse to another method of approaching the divine superabundance. In this method he makes use of the term 'theophany'. This notion permits the description of God in terms deriving from the realm of creation, while guaranteeing the natural, hierarchical distance between God and creation. Thus it serves in effect as a kind of counterpart to Eriugena's negative theology. It names the divine qualities, even when their denial would be far more appropriate. In general, theophany enables Eriugena to describe the divine nature by means of positive claims, without his having to return to indirect, metaphorical imagery. The weight of the theophanic argument derives ultimately from God himself, who has become manifest by his descent into creation. Because of the attested inherence of the divine element in this concept,<sup>2</sup> the use of theophany, as a kind of technical term, enables Eriugena fully to exploit created language limited as it is, describing God without encapsulating him. There will always remain the veil of *velut proprie*, but behind it looms divine authority rather

<sup>1</sup> On Eriugena's negative theology, see McGinn 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Per.* I 446C-D, Sh.-W.: 46: *Non enim essentia divina deus solummodo dicitur sed etiam modus ille quo se quodam modo intellectuali et rationali creaturae prout est capacitas uniuscuiusque ostendit deus saepe a sancta scriptura vocatur.*

than human deficiency. Through this method Eriugena manages effectively to exceed the destructive accuracy of negative theology.

Expressing the indefinable divine element in created terminology, theophany contributes to the evocation of an osmotic conjunction of God and the created universe which is so distinctive in Eriugena's cosmic speculations. Through theophany there seems to arise a natural correspondence between God and creation. This may account for the occurrence of some original, albeit peripheral features of Eriugena's thinking. For example, his peculiar attention to natural science, which emerges in his earliest text, the *Annotationes in Martianum Capellam*, can perhaps be better understood when interpreted in this same 'theophanic' sense. The author's quasi-scientific interest in and curiosity about nature reflected in this work indicates a kind of human intellectual freedom which is in fact much broader. Exhorted by the flexible strength of his reasoning faculties, man is encouraged to strain himself in order to detect the laws of nature. The theophanic character of the universe not only heightens nature's status, but stresses its accessibility for theologians and natural philosophers alike, the author notably sharing the interests of both.

Although it seems a different area of the author's thought, the close connection between divine Scripture and universal nature should also be seen as related to theophany.<sup>3</sup> Thus it will prove to be an Eriugenian hallmark of much importance. We have noticed how theophany firmly roots the unlimited scope of *natura* in the self-expression of God. The self-manifestation of the divine has no doubt received its highest, authoritative form in the statements of Scripture. It is through theophany, therefore, that Eriugena can associate the unsurmountable authority of Scripture with the natural order of the cosmos, freeing nature from the superstitions which may hold the uneducated captive, and propagating a clear observation of natural laws instead.

Yet the use of theophany, however much it may open up nature to the

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<sup>3</sup> Though Cappuyns has already drawn attention to the parallel view of *natura creata* and *scriptura* (see Cappuyns 1933: 276-280; De Lubac I 1, 1959: 121-128), I wish to extend this parallelism to cover in fact all of *natura*. In an article about the bosom of nature (*sinus naturae*) Jeaneau speaks about created nature as being generated by the productive silence of 'Nature créée-créatrice', with which it forms a unity, in the sense that through the seeming reality of sensible nature one can know the deeper being of invisible nature (Jeaneau 1978 in Jeaneau 1987a: 241). In my opinion theophany establishes a true and intrinsic connection between nature as a whole (i.e. created as well as creative) and Scripture. In this respect it also seems useful to draw attention to a singular parallelism that was revealed before, namely that between philosophy and religion (see ch. 1.2. above; *De praed.* I, 1). It rather seems as if Eriugena wants to remove all traces that could lead to the distinction between a 'sacred' and a 'profane' realm of thought, not only in the *Per.*, but also in his earlier works like the *Annot. in Mart.* and the *De praed.* I see the concept of 'theophany' functioning as a theoretical foundation for this remarkable aspect of Eriugena's thought.

explorations of the human mind, never leads Eriugena to debase or compromise *natura*'s superior character. Rather, it has a reverse effect. In our previous analysis we have established that nature's most outstanding trait is its all-embracing scope, expressed in the circumspect formulation of the *Periphyseon*'s prologue. Thereby it was shown that Eriugena's universe reveals an intrinsic reliance on rational principles. By lifting all of creation including matter and the simplest elements to the level of the divine through theophany, Eriugena manages effectively to upgrade this character of *natura* as an indefinable universal whole. It is as if, in anticipation of the eschatological return, the hierarchical relationship between the two constituent departments of nature has fallen into complete oblivion. The concept of theophany helps Eriugena to expand his expressive range, allowing him to describe the totality of the universe through the close affiliation of such apparently separate realms as the created and the divine.

However, the obvious disregard for the distinction between God and creation is only an optical illusion, conditioned as it is by Eriugena's perspective of the universe. In chapter 2.3. the effect of theophany, with its significant effect of presenting the totality of things under the guise of divine omnipresence, has been characterized as that of a 'trompe-l'oeil'. Human language, as long as it is supported and backed by the divine, can overcome its human frontiers; it thereby manages to get some sort of grasp on what lies beyond. Through theophany, the perspective from which the author contemplates *natura*, divine infinity looms up on the horizon. With Eriugena, *natura* does not just encompass God and creation, but contains an inexhaustable surplus of manifest divine power.<sup>4</sup>

By nature of its definition, however, theophany can never approach the true essence of God's being. Its operating effects will always have to be located in the shade of the divine nature that generates them. This means that the distance between God and creation, however stripped of its hierarchical connotations it may appear, remains valid underneath the mantle of theophanic description. But instead of an unbridgeable gap, the distance is presented now in a much more dynamic way, as the dialectical reciprocity of manifest apparition and invisible reality, tangible verisimilitude and unattainable truth. The authority of the divine essence itself, being inexorable, proves to be the founding force as well as the propelling power of this theophanic system. Without it, the working of theophany as an optical illusion ('trompe-l'oeil') would be a matter of complete arbi-

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<sup>4</sup> The receding horizon of this divine power, ultimately unattainable, is most clearly illustrated by Eriugena's description of the fourth species of nature as *natura non creans et non creata*. Through the 'serial negation' applied here Eriugena rather overcomes the destructiveness of negative theology, thus reaching virtually the same effect as when resorting to terms like *superessentialis*.



trariness. With it, Eriugena can freely evoke the all-embracing universe without ever overreaching himself by fencing in an infinite and divine world, the ultimate contingency of which implies that it lies entirely beyond human control.<sup>5</sup>

Negative theology has brought Eriugena to the utmost boundaries of human language. Its driving force is only brought to a standstill by the absorbing power of divine nothingness. Instead of depleting the possibilities of human language in a confrontation with the divine *nihil*,<sup>6</sup> which for that matter is said to coincide with God's *superessentialitas*,<sup>7</sup> Eriugena appears to tread on much more fertile ground when resorting to the notion of theophany.<sup>8</sup> It gives him the possibility of contemplating God and creation on an equal basis in the context of the one unbroken universe of *natura*. Seemingly pantheistic at times, the *Periphyseon*'s ultimate concern -already visible in this work's prologue- is to safeguard the seamless unity of *natura*, and yet to present it in its very diversity. The coherence of the *Periphyseon*'s universe appears to be particularly increased and tightened by Eriugena's theophanic presentation of it.

In fact, it seems as if Eriugena must have conceived of a theophanic universe from the very outset of the *Periphyseon*, even before he could explicitly introduce the notion, which he subsequently comes to apply all the more regularly (as in the case of the divine nothing). Only by assuming that Eriugena's view of nature was theophanic all along, which implies the universe's intrinsic coherence, is one able to understand why he wants to expose his general concept to different divisions, supplemented by even more interpretational modes. These different models are supposed to draw our attention to new perspectives on the totality of *natura*, -something of which Eriugena never loses sight however detailed a description he may give. It is only through theophany that he feels free to bring about continuous shifts of emphasis in his ultimate interpretation of the

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<sup>5</sup> By adducing the aspect of nature's contingency here I want to draw attention to the realm of the created effects, the world in which man lives, which is generally marked by imperfection because of its existence in rude matter.

<sup>6</sup> In Book III of the *Periphyseon* Eriugena embarks on a lengthy discussion of the divine *nihil*, from which all things are claimed to derive their existence, see chs.5-23, 634A-690B, Sh.-W.: 60-188. See also the summary of this argument in the Introduction of Book III, Sh.-W.: 5-11.

<sup>7</sup> See *Per.* III 686D, Sh.-W.: 180: *Eo igitur vocabulo [sc. nihilo] deum vocari necesse est qui solus negatione omnium quae sunt proprie innuitur quia super omne quod dicitur et intelligitur exaltatur, qui nullum eorum quae sunt et quae non sunt est, qui melius nesciendo scitur.*

<sup>8</sup> Eriugena establishes an undeniable connection between the question of *nihil* and the function of the theophanies with regard to the incomprehensible God. See *Per.* III 681A, Sh.-W.: 166: *Dum ergo [sc. the ineffable and incomprehensible brilliance of the Divine Goodness] incomprehensibilis intelligitur per excellentiam nihilum non immerito vocatur, at vero in suis theophaniis incipiens apparere veluti ex nihilo in aliquid dicitur procedere, et quae proprie super omnem essentiam existimatur proprie quoque in omni essentia cognoscitur ideoque omnis visibilis et invisibilis creatura theophania, id est divina apparitio, potest appellari.*

universe, while still prudently observing its given indefinable totality. Thus theophany inaugurates a kind of freedom of speech which stimulates Eriugena not only to explore new areas of human language, but also to integrate them completely.<sup>9</sup> His interests reveal nature's wide-spread diversity, as they range from scriptural exegesis to natural science, and from dogmatic theology to dialectical prestidigitation. On the whole, theophany imbues the *Periphyseon*'s dialogue with an atmosphere of unequalled expansiveness.

Responsible as it is for *natura*'s harmonious consistency, the notion of theophany can thus be seen as setting the interaction between God and creation in motion. However true it might be, this conclusion could well lead us to question whether the introduction of theophany is anything more than the application of a rhetorical device, blurring traditional distinctions and allowing much logical imprecision instead. Among other things the lurking danger of pantheism threatens to destroy the efficacy of Eriugena's thinking on the universe. To counteract this objection we need to give full weight to the *Periphyseon*'s opening phrases. The casual opening tone of the *Periphyseon* has already been noted. Apparently introducing this work as just another moment of pondering, the prologue came to reveal unexpected and far-ranging consequences when an explicit rational context was found to be the only fertile basis for the inquiry of *natura*. We have subsequently demonstrated that this seemingly self-supporting character of *natura* as a rational concept presupposes for its functioning a theophanic background. But our description of theophany as a 'trompe-l'oeil' may in retrospect give rise to second thoughts about the validity of Eriugena's arguments. To clarify this problem it is of fundamental importance to explore further the principles of *divisio* and *analysis*, as the governing rules of Eriugena's rational thinking.

*Divisio* or *analysis*, or *processio* and *reditus* as they are alternatively called, portray the process that should lead to the eschatological union of creation with the divine. As a dialectical movement, Eriugena's concept of *natura* is always balanced by these dynamic principles. It is to the rational guidelines of *divisio* and *analysis* that Eriugena has willingly committed himself for the precise purpose of ordering his discourse. Therefore, by studying the implications of their effectiveness we may suppose to discover the fundamental structure of all Eriugenian rationalism.

This structure has taken external shape in the four forms of nature. As

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<sup>9</sup> A perfect example of this can be found in the aforementioned question of *nihil*. Interpreting it as pertaining to God's superessentiality rather than as a negative deprivation of meaning (as would have been the case when adhering strictly to the rules of negative theology), Eriugena manages to remove an important contradiction, deftly reasoning from God's nothingness to a fullness of apparitional modes.

we have seen in Eriugena's treatment of nature's second division, the first three species represent the process of division. *Natura* starts out from a state of undifferentiated simplicity in God as its first species, and unfolds itself into multiplicity. The last form, or rather the transition from the third to the fourth species, which is also God, foreshadows the return from a dispersed universe into a state of renewed homogeneity. By protracting the treatment of this second division to cover the full extent of the *Periphyseon*, it seems that Eriugena claims universal validity for the rule of these rational principles. They provide not only the dynamic framework of *natura*, but also the actual subject-matter for the five books of the *Periphyseon*.<sup>10</sup> Thus through their usage we are given a most concrete and accurate representation of the diversity of reality (*omnes res*). Book I contemplates *natura* in its capacity of being *creans et non creata*, Book II focuses on *natura creans et creata*, Book III on *natura non creans et creata* and Book IV-V on *natura non creans et non creata*.

Eriugena sets out to investigate the totality of all things, with *divisio* and *analysis* determining his rational perspective. This is brought out even more clearly by his view that *natura* derives its essential unity from its theophanic character, although Eriugena only opts for an explicit introduction of this term after the dialectical prologue. However, as it has been made clear that *natura* fully depends on God for its ultimate reality, it naturally follows that it may be considered a divine apparition. All Eriugena's arguments must implicitly reflect this idea, which can be taken even further by stating that it is only as such that nature can be known at all. With Eriugena's interpretation of *natura* as outright *theophania*, nature's multifarious aspects, the created as well as the divine, prove overtly submissive to the same dialectical guidelines which characterize and govern the process of the author's thinking. Because it is granted with the authority of divine consent theophany, therefore, seems to add efficiency to the very process of *divisio* and *analysis*.

Thus in the *Periphyseon* Eriugena accomplishes the complete integration of nature's theophanic and its dialectical character. This allows him to draw a coherent picture of the universe, but it also means that the identification of God and creation as the most daring conclusion of a theophanic world-view, can never be more than a momentary phase in the universal process of division and analysis. By no means is it to be seen as an act of audacious pantheism. As divine apparitions, theophanies cannot be put upon a par with the underlying essence of God. These manifestations of God may by divine authority nevertheless pass for God, since they are as close to the divine origin as human reason will ever get, either here on

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<sup>10</sup> This is stated at various points in the *Periphyseon*. See e.g. Eriugena's summary of the four forms of *natura* found at the beginning of Book IV, 741C-744A.

earth or in the eschatological afterlife. Therefore, from the perspective of creation one cannot attain a higher goal than the grasp of these theophanies, their identity for the human mind being indistinguishable from the divine nature itself.<sup>11</sup>

To summarize the effects of the integration of the theophanic and the dialectic aspect of nature: it is ultimately because of *natura*'s theophanic character that the dialectical movements of division and analysis can freely unfold, incorporating in a seemingly indissoluble manner both God and creation. And it is because of the dialectical character of *natura* that, on the other hand, Eriugena's theophanic view will never become a stagnant metaphor concealing much more than it can actually unveil.

### *B. The Theophanic Impact of Procession and Return*

The concept of theophany effectively opens up *natura* to human understanding by permitting Eriugena to treat all nature's aspects on an equal basis, without doing injustice to the underlying divine reality, which remains essentially superior and inaccessible. In this manner theophany functions as a rhetorical tool with which the author can integrate all things, whether they are understandable or beyond human conception, into one concept of nature, of which he intends to give us an overall description and analysis.<sup>12</sup> Because of its rhetorical nature theophany suggests a certain way of reading the *Periphyseon*'s text, which should take into account that the divine apparition has taken the shape of reality. Yet the subterfuge of similarity between God and creation could lead to confusion, giving rise to unbalanced and disoriented speculations on the part of the author, who is responsible for the introduction of this term, or of the reader who follows in the author's footsteps. It is in this respect that the principles of *processio* and *reditus* play a decisive role in the *Periphyseon*. No matter to what degree God and creation can be seen to take each other's position, there will always be the larger dynamic framework which determines the final direction of nature's development.

Even the well-ordered balance of *processio* and *reditus* is to a large extent

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<sup>11</sup> See the passage in the beginning of Book I where Eriugena introduces the notion of theophany, *Per.* I 446A-C, Sh.-W.: 44-46. The Student quotes Augustine who affirms that the angels see the primordial causes first in God and thereafter in their effects. The Master contradicts this by saying that what the angels actually perceive are theophanies rather than the causes themselves. For who, says the Apostle, has known the intellect of the Lord? (Rom. 11:34).

<sup>12</sup> By 'rhetorical' I mean that on the level of the text the comparison between God and his theophanies leads us to declare them identical, although in the final analysis they cannot be ranked on the same level, since one is ranked on the level of creative and the other on the level of created nature.

only rhetorical, leading to various dialectical schemes as a result of the continuous shift of emphasis in Eriugena's presentation of the universe. Yet it cannot be denied that in the last instance their alternation gains momentum, because nature's course will be pinned down by the uniqueness of its ultimate frame of reference: the process of divine creation. It is on this point that Christian Neoplatonic thought fundamentally differs from other Neoplatonic systems; its cycle of numerous reiterations is restricted because it ultimately deals with the inimitable, concrete act of divine creation, which is the direct object of biblical description.<sup>13</sup> In Eriugena, the dominating principles of *processio* and *reditus* measure both the logical movement of unity and multiplicity and the unique process of creation. In fact by allowing for their parallel development, the principles of procession and return appear to form what is the only material link between these two processes.

This parallel development consists in the concurrence of a repeatable logical process and a unique linear operation at work in the *Periphyseon*, both leading to the union of God and creation. We have observed how the process of division and analysis, which determines the second division of nature, also supplies the material contents of the work. It depicts the continuous interaction of oneness and multiplicity within the totality of *natura*. Yet the same dialectical pair guide the unique unfolding of *processio* and *reditus* that coincides with the spatio-temporal development of creation. When in the beginning of Book IV Eriugena mentions the art of dialectics explicitly, he has no problem combining the two strands just mentioned (the aspect of a logical development alongside that of a unique creation process); they are seen as intrinsically connected, as they both are inherent in this very art. Furthermore, by explicitly declaring the art of dialectic to be created by God, Eriugena embeds it in a particular Christian view of the universe, which is ultimately oriented towards the eschatological reconciliation between God and creation:

And from this we understand that the particular art that divides *genera* into *species*, and unravels *species* into *genera*, which is called *διαλεκτική*, is not brought about by human contrivances; but it is established in the nature of things by the maker of all arts which truly are 'the arts', and it is found by wise men, and can be put to use by the skilled investigation of things. (*Per.* IV 748D-749A)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> However, the distinction between pagan philosophy and Christian thought should not be too rigidly applied. In early and medieval Christian theology one cannot easily separate between so-called speculative thought, whether orthodox or heterodox, and biblical exegesis. For a recent survey of the various exegetical interpretations of Genesis 1-3 from the early Christian period to the time of Augustine, see Pagels 1988: esp. 57-77 (ch. 3: Gnostic Improvisations on Genesis).

<sup>14</sup> Since in this chapter I do not focus on longer sections of the *Periphyseon*'s text, I have left out most references to the speakers in the dialogue.

This definition of dialectics, which does not originate with Eriugena<sup>15</sup> (Alcuin had previously formulated the divine origin of all the arts),<sup>16</sup> reveals a new dimension here in the specific context of the *Periphyseon*. As Eriugena's speculations are gradually drawing to a close, he broaches the theme of *reditus*, with which he will be largely concerned throughout the last two books of the *Periphyseon*. Placed at the beginning of Book IV where the theme of *reditus* first surfaces, the statement about the divine origin of the art of dialectic, -as often in Eriugena the art of dialectic is here differentiated from the other arts-, appears to enhance the radical and programmatic impact this movement of return will have on nature.<sup>17</sup> It becomes clear that the final *reditus* must take place along the lines that are set out by dialectic which, rather than only being needed as an extraneous, rhetorical device, is defined as explicitly created by God. As a direct result of this definition, the art of dialectic can appear to us as inherent in *natura rerum*.<sup>18</sup>

Created by God, dialectic must deal first and foremost with the representation of the divine. It may therefore rightfully be called a theophanic art. The issue of divine representation is seen to dominate the author's reasoning once again. It is brought out here even more strongly than usual. As it is the constant purpose of the dialectical movement to

<sup>15</sup> At this point in his thinking it is, however, original. Before the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena had valued the arts and interpreted them as necessary, or even indispensable, but he had not spoken of them as explicitly created by God. Although I do not want to overrate the importance of this issue, it may be worthwhile to quote an Eriugenian statement in which he uses the presence of the arts in the human soul to support its immortality: *respondendum omnes artes quibus rationalis anima utitur naturaliter omnibus hominibus inesse, sive eis bene utantur sive male abutantur, sive omnino illarum exercitatione caruerint, ac per hoc omnem humanam animam propter insita sibi sapientiae studia immortalem conficitur esse* (Annot. in Mart. 17,12, Lutz: 27). Cf. *Per.* IV 767B: *Neque enim verisimile est, Deum ad imaginem et similitudinem suam creasse mentem, cui naturaliter peritia atque disciplina non ingenta sit; alioquin non esset mens, sed bruta quaedam irrationabilisque vita*. See Mathon 1967: 56-64. See also Moran 1989: 129-132, 191-208.

<sup>16</sup> The general theory of Alcuin on the liberal arts is explained by Schrimpf 1982: ch.2, 23-35. In a letter to Charlemagne Alcuin describes the arts as created by God: *...Nam philosophi non fuerunt conditores harum artium, sed inventores. Nam Creator omnium rerum condidit eas in naturas sicut voluit. Illi vero, qui sapientiores erant in mundo, inventores erant harum artium in naturis rerum, sicut de sole et luna et stellis facile potes intelligere* (Ep. LXXXIII, PL 100, 271D-272A).

<sup>17</sup> The connection between the concept of *reditus* and the position of the liberal arts, notably the art of dialectic, can also be exemplified from Book V. See e.g. *Per.* V 868C-869C, where the Student says: *Neque mihi morosum, neque superfluum videtur, sed valde utile et commodum, ut, quomodo ex motibus rerum sensibilibus quaedam exempla de reditu naturae assumpta sunt, ita etiam ex intelligibilium contemplationibus, quae sola mentis conceptione percipiuntur, ad eundem reditum suadendum introducantur, praesertim cum maioris virtutis sint ad faciendam rei dubiae fidem argumenta, quae ex inconcussis verarum artium regulis, quam quae ex corporalium sensuum conjecturis comparantur; licet et illa sine rationis et intelligentiae ducatu nec inveniri nec approbari possint* (*Per.* V 868C-D).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Beierwaltes 1984: 535-536.

be detected and followed by the human mind, the divine nature seems responsible not only for having created the art of dialectic, but ultimately for having thus instigated the very process of human thought (...*a sapientibus inventa*...). Hence Eriugena's strong interest in dialectic, for it is innate in human reason as well as representative of the divine. Naturally, the human mind should attempt to profit as much as possible from this art: it is designed to organize its rational investigation (...*ad utilitatem solerti rerum indagine usitata*...), elevating it to the level of divine manifestation.

As a theophanic art dialectic appears to be inherent in the natural structure of things. In its theophanic capacity it permits the visualization of the universe by tailoring it to the scope of the human intellect. Because it is always backed by divine authority, Eriugena's dialectical reasoning avoids the possible degeneration of theophany into an arbitrary divinization of cosmological categories, which would turn the universe into an incomprehensible and structureless jumble. The theophanic interpretation of nature finds meaningful expression in the *Periphyseon* precisely because it is balanced by the dialectical movement of *processio* and *reditus*. Only by sticking to these guiding principles can Eriugena implement theophany as a suitable concept for the comprehension of the universe by the human mind.<sup>19</sup> When one wants to interpret *natura* as a whole, that is with all its fragmentary elements included, the dialectical character of theophanic presentation should always be kept in mind.<sup>20</sup> Due to the fact that it structures God's self-manifestation in the *Periphyseon*'s all-embracing universe, it provides the only means of controlling and verifying the author's intentions with *natura*.

The scheme of procession and return thus appears to be of more than merely additional importance. Since dialectic is inherent in the very nature of things, its use goes beyond a mere matter of approach and touches on the very essence of *natura*. It comes to reflect its infinity. The combina-

<sup>19</sup> Note how theophany borders on the verge of being nothing but a sheer 'phantasy'. See e.g. *Per.* V 963C, where Eriugena says that not all phantasies are bad, apparently placing theophany among them: ...*quoniam et beatorum felicitas, quae in contemplatione veritatis constituitur, in phantasiis, quas propter differentiam aliarum phantasiarum theologi theophanias appellant, administrabitur*. It is in order to draw a clear distinction between the so-called 'good' and the 'bad' phantasies that I have chosen to emphasize the dialectical aspects of theophany. For Eriugena's general theory of phantasies, including theophanies, see Foussard 1977.

<sup>20</sup> An interesting passage in Book III on the subject of theophany brings out the dialectical character of theophanic reality. *Per.* III 633A-B, Sh.-W.: 58 says: *Omne enim quod intelligitur et sentitur nihil aliud est nisi non apparentis apparitio, occulti manifestatio, negati affirmatio, incomprehensibilis comprehensio, ineffabilis fatus, inaccessibilis accessus, inintelligibilis intellectus, incorporealis corpus, superessentialis essentia, informis forma, immensurabilis mensura, innumerabilis numerus, carentis pondere pondus, spiritalis incrassatio, invisibilis visibilitas, illocalis localitas, carentis tempore temporalitas, infiniti diffinitio, incircumscripti circumscriptio et caetera quae puro intellectu et cogitantur et perspiciuntur et quae memoriae sinibus capi nesciunt et mentis aciem fugiunt.*

tion of a reproducible logical and a unique linear aspect gives the dialectical pair of *processio* and *reditus* a crucial role in the evolution of *natura*, as it has taken concrete shape in the *Periphyseon*. It enables us to see the *Periphyseon* as an attempt not only to describe and interpret the infinite stretch of the universe, but actually to re-create *natura* in its very spaciousness and all-embracing character. Only with the help of a theophanic dialectical structure, is the author gradually able to take a sure grasp on a universe which initially he could only evoke metaphorically. The dialectical notions of procession and return, while anchoring his view in the concrete reality of creation, coordinate the theophanic representation of the universe and at the same time facilitate its expression in speech.<sup>21</sup> The balance brought about by the reciprocity of division and analysis must therefore form the ultimate frame of reference for an analysis of Eriugena's speculations on the nature of the universe.

By raising the question of how the divine nature can be expressed in speech, theophany has led us back to the wide-ranging problem of the applicability and adequacy of human language. Yet, as in all Eriugenian thinking, the problem of theophany is ultimately a dialectical matter. Although it reflects the divine outlook on Eriugena's all-embracing subject-matter, i.e. *natura*, theophany's efficient development depends on human dialectical rules of development, i.e. the movement of *processio* and *reditus*. Because of its dual character, as both a logical and a unique process, the dialectic of procession and return demonstrates this same double-sided quality on the level of language.

The terms of procession and return serve first of all to integrate Eriugena's various views of *natura*. By viewing the notion of *theophania* as the most complicated and upsetting concept introduced to describe and interpret nature, we have recognized that the divine essence itself gives it momentum, though all the while it is implied that God's definitive reality can never be completely grasped. Thus *natura* and *theophania* offer what appear to be two different perspectives on the same underlying totality of all things, the categories of *processio* and *reditus* directing the course of the universe's final development. This will become manifest in the way Eriugena presents his analysis not only of nature, but also of man.

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<sup>21</sup> This does not necessarily mean that this expression in speech has to be out loud. Discussing the role of the liberal arts in Book V, the Master confines the *trivium* to dialectics only, since he finds that grammar and rhetoric can easily be reduced to this central art of dialectic, as mere branches of the same river. The Student agrees with this, saying: *Potest enim rationabilis anima intra semetipsam de liberalibus disciplinis tractare, absque vocis articulatae disertaeque orationis strepitu* (Per. V 870B-C). However, contradicting this, see Per. IV 780B-C, where Eriugena rates the importance of the 'live' interaction between two partners, which takes place throughout the *Periphyseon*, of higher worth.



Secondly, due to the fact that the art of dialectic is created by God and as such is inherent in the nature of all things, the tracing and following of nature's procession and return is more than an act of straightforward analysis. By its very nature therefore, the dialectical model of analysis is more than a mere framework, because it is actually part of the material it is itself applied to.<sup>22</sup> The nature of all things being by the author's choice and definition a theophanic one, dialectic involves much more than a merely logical operation: it entails the representation of the complete universe, created as well as divine.

### C. Conclusion

*Natura*, in its capacity as theophany, is fundamentally a dialectical whole. As such it manifests the categories of procession and return, not only indicating to the human mind its course of development, but also forming an intrinsic part of it, which should by no means be isolated. Consequently, when Eriugena undertakes the rational investigation of theophanic *natura* in his *Periphyseon*, it can be deduced not only that he intends a full-scale rational analysis, but also that he in fact aims at no lesser goal than the dialectical re-creation of the universe in human speech.<sup>23</sup>

The differences between the original divine creation of the universe and the *Periphyseon*'s re-creation are remarkably few. They affect neither the scope of the enterprise, which concerns the undefinable totality of all things, nor its final object, which is the establishment of the eternal union of the created and the divine. The sole divergence between creation and re-creation appears to be the nature of their authorship: a divine original or a theophanic apparition. The theophanic character of *natura*, the contingency inherent in its apparitional mode of reality, prevents Eriugena ever arriving at its true divine essence. Theophany thus shifts the weight of nature's dialectical development to the *Periphyseon*'s reproductive reasoning, which reveals the author's all-embracing vision. By nature of its theophanic quality dialectic, however remote from God himself it may be, eventually aspires to touch on the divine impulse behind *natura*'s unfolding, while remaining firmly rooted in human understanding.

This dual nature, combining human rationality with divine manifestation, grants the art of dialectic an intermediate position between *theophania*

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<sup>22</sup> Eriugena has never conceived of *natura* other than as a dialectical concept. The most remarkable example of this is still the beginning of the prologue, where the 'dialectical' whole of *ea quae sunt et ea quae non sunt* describes what comes close to constituting the definition of indefinable *natura*.

<sup>23</sup> Jeuneau has expressed himself in that same direction: 'En fait, dans son *Periphyseon*, l'Érigène s'est efforcé de recréer l'univers.' (*Hom. prol. Jean.*, Jeuneau: 45).

(which reflects the divine tendency to lock itself away for the mind's grasp) and *natura* (which is based upon the open principle of rationality). The human mind, well-trained in the art of dialectic, must try to steer a steady course between nature's two countermovements: procession and return. It must not fail to incorporate nature's divine aspects, but it should always remain conscious of its ever-present human defects.

### 3.2 Man's Position 'inside' and 'outside' the Universe

#### A. 'Outside' the Universe

The crucial role of the human mind has charged the author of the *Periphyseon* with an incomparable task, i.e. the re-creation of a universe that encloses all things. Even the manifestation of the divine, introduced in the *Periphyseon* by the concept of theophany, can only be expounded on the authority of the human mind. While executing this self-imposed task Eriugena appears to be virtually independent, as he bears ultimate responsibility for the measures taken on behalf of human reason. We have seen before how his rational re-creation of the all-embracing universe is funnelled through *processio* and *reditus*, which on account of nature's double role both as a logical model and a unique creation process, link the author's re-establishment of the universe with God's original creation. The art of dialectic, as well as facilitating the logical exposition of ideas, also increases their rightful claim to reality, always in the *Periphyseon* of a theophanic nature. According to Eriugena, dialectic is created by God and it is for that reason rooted in the very nature of things, the *Periphyseon*'s actual object of study. Thus the tie between divine *natura* and Eriugena's dialectical description of it can never be broken. They appear to be interdependent quantities, neither of which can exist without its counterpart.

It seems that *processio* and *reditus*, by providing the dialectical perspective from which Eriugena contemplates *natura*, must also determine the course of its unfolding. This is illustrated by the second division of nature. Of the four species Eriugena puts forward, the first three represent the movement of *processio* by which God becomes manifest in the multiple facets of creation.<sup>24</sup> The last species, or rather the transition from the third to the fourth, reflects the process of *reditus* by which creation is brought back to its original undivided state in God, who is its sole origin. Apart from establishing this second division of nature, the dynamic movement of procession and return emphatically dominates the actual develop-

<sup>24</sup> For an excellent study of the dynamic nature of *processio*, its ontological as well as its epistemological connotations in Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa, see Riccati 1983.

ment of the dialogue the Master and his Student carry out throughout the work.

In our opening chapter we discussed Books I and II of the *Periphyseon*. Book I focuses on God as *natura creans et non creata*, i.e. God as ἀναρχος, who by a volitional act decides to unfold his being in creation. The main theme of this book is the description of the divine unity, which towers above all modes of predication in human language. In relation to this problem Eriugena treats of kataphatic and apophatic theology, and of the ten categories and their applicability to God. His apodeictic opinion is that the truth of every epithet describing God will eventually have to be denied. About God he says:

...who is above every essence and understanding, of whom there is neither reason nor understanding, who is neither spoken nor understood, for whom there is neither name nor word. Yet as we have often said, all things from the highest to the lowest can be said of him not unreasonably through some kind of similitude or dissimilitude or contrariety or opposition, because all things that can be predicated of him take their being from him. For he created not only things like himself, but also things unlike himself, because he himself is like as well as unlike, being also the cause of counterparts. (*Per.* I 510C-D, Sh.-W.: 192)

Since God remains the ultimate cause of all predications, human language, however unable to grasp the divine essence it may appear, will continue to reveal at least some connection with it. In fact, the irreparable disjunction between God as he is and as he appears from the attempts to describe him, which because of their created nature must always lack adequacy, adds to the possibilities of human expression in speech. If theophanies in their capacities as metaphorical images are said not to require an immediate correspondence with the divine, God may just as well be portrayed through the use of dissimilitudes, contraries and oppositions.<sup>25</sup> After all, they equally derive from him as their source. It rather seems as if Eriugena has a slight preference for the predication of God through images that are contrary to nature. Uninstructed minds will be less easily deceived by such unlikely metaphors, which emphasize the contrast between God and creation, than by the predication of seemingly accurate qualities, such as are indicated by the Divine Names.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Compare the passage here quoted with a statement earlier in Book I, where Eriugena, following Pseudo-Dionysius, shows the same preference for unlikely metaphors, *Per.* I 458B, Sh.-W.: 74: ...*et non solum ex his quae sunt secundum naturam eam [sc. divinam essentiam et substantiam] edocet sed ex his quae contra naturam, quando eam inebriari stultitiamque esse et insanire dicit. Sed de his nunc non est nostri propositi disserere; satis enim de talibus a sancto Dionysio Ariopagita in Symbolica Theologia dictum est,*... For Dionysius' Symbolical Theology, see Roques 1962: 129-130.

<sup>26</sup> The problem of symbolism seems more likely to be dealt with by Eriugena in his

Having studied various approaches to the divine essence as the source of all things, Eriugena turns to the second species of nature in Book II. *Natura creans et creata* refers to the so-called primordial causes of all things which go by different names, such as eternal reasons, ideas, divine volitions. God created them all together in the Divine Word, which in accordance with John 1:1 is to be identified with the second person of the Trinity. Eriugena holds the view that the Father, i.e. God as the cause of all things, premeditated all things in the Son. The primordial causes were eternally and collectively made in the Divine Word.<sup>27</sup> Subsequently they have become apparent through generation in the spatio-temporal world. In this view the primordial causes have a kind of intermediate function: they are participations in the divine cause, manifesting themselves as the intelligible principles of all visible and invisible things. In turn, these visible and invisible things participate in their essential participations.<sup>28</sup>

For the most part Book II deals with various aspects of the primordial causes.<sup>29</sup> Some other themes are reviewed in relation to this major issue, such as Maximus' anthropology<sup>30</sup> (which is associated with the matter of the primordial causes through the figure of Christ, the exemplary cause of mankind), the question of the Trinity (the human as well as the divine), the three divine persons, the categories. Except for the part dealing with Maximus' anthropology Book II forms a fairly integrated whole.<sup>31</sup> The discussion of the above matters is initiated by a discussion of the opening sentence of the book of Genesis about God creating heaven and earth ('*In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram. Terra autem erat inanis et vacua, et tenebrae erant super faciem abyssi, et Spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas*'), which appears

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commentary on Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy*, which he wrote some years after the *Periphyseon*. A lucid exposition of Eriugena's opinion on this matter, which adequately compares his views with those of Pseudo-Dionysius, can be found in Roques 1975b. On the issue of the celestial hierarchies in Dionysius, see Roques 1954:135-167.

<sup>27</sup> See *Per.* II 529A-C, Sh.-W.: 14.

<sup>28</sup> See the end of Book II for Eriugena's summary on the subject of the primordial causes, *Per.* II 615D-620A, Sh.-W.: 204-212. For the question of their intermediate role, see *Per.* II 616B. For a further discussion of the matter of participation, see *Per.* III 630A-634A, Sh.-W.: 50-60.

<sup>29</sup> *Per.* II 545B, Sh.-W.: 46: *...siquidem huius praesentis libri textus nil aliud flagitat quam ut pro viribus nostris quicquid lux animorum largita fuerit de primordialibus causis disputemus.*

<sup>30</sup> This important discussion of Maximus' anthropology is found in *Per.* II 529C-542C, Sh.-W.: 14-42. Eriugena quotes from *Ambig.*, PG 91, 1304D-1312B. For a summary, see Stock 1967: 3-9. On Maximus' general anthropology, see Thunberg 1965: 100-178.

<sup>31</sup> In the context of Book II this exposition appears to be a digression, which could well be the result of Eriugena's adhering to Maximus' arguments rather than pursuing his own line of thought. It is for this reason also that I regard it as not crucial to Eriugena's own anthropology (i.e. man seen in the context of infinite *natura*), which is developed mainly in Book IV of the *Periphyseon*. However, Maximus' doctrine is important, because we will encounter many of its elements throughout Book IV.

to contain all these elements, placing them in a particular hierarchical order.<sup>32</sup> *Deus* refers to God the Father who in the beginning, -*principium* representing the Son *alias* the Divine Word-, created heaven and earth. Together heaven and earth form the repository of the primordial causes, which Eriugena has identified as the prototypes of all intelligible (i.e. heavenly) and sensible (i.e. earthly) things.<sup>33</sup> The earth being waste and void refers to the primordial causes of visible things.<sup>34</sup> The darkness covering the abyss points to the incomprehensibility of the causes of the intelligible essences, as they surpass the human intellect altogether and can never be adequately known.<sup>35</sup> Only God can grasp their true meaning, which is conveyed by the powerful image of the Holy Spirit hovering above the waters. In the person of the Spirit, God is supereminent through his excellent knowledge.<sup>36</sup> These and supplementary reflections on the same issue of the primordial causes are the main contents of the *Periphyseon*'s Book II.<sup>37</sup>

The description of nature's *processio* continues in the third book of the *Periphyseon*, with Eriugena turning to the contemplation of the third form of *natura non creans et creata*. As in Book II, Book III starts out with a summary of the previous book. So it takes up the subject of the primordial causes again, especially the problem of their arrangement, i.e. whether or not they are placed in any hierarchical order.<sup>38</sup> After the discussion of the primordial causes Eriugena embarks on a long diversion concerning the interpretation of the divine *nihil*.<sup>39</sup> This matter is of fundamental importance in the context of the *Periphyseon*, as it had generally attracted great attention in Christian philosophy.<sup>40</sup> The status of the divine noth-

<sup>32</sup> *Per.* II 545B, Sh.-W.: 48: N. *Ratiocinationis exordium ex divinis eloquiis assumendum esse aestimo. A. Nil convenientius. Ex ea enim omnem veritatis inquisitionem initium sumere necessarium est. N. Divinissimus propheta, Moysea dico, in prima fronte libri geneseos, 'In principio,' inquit, 'fecit deus caelum et terram.'*

<sup>33</sup> See *Per.* II 546A-B, Sh.-W.: 48-50.

<sup>34</sup> See *Per.* II 550A-B, Sh.-W.: 56-58.

<sup>35</sup> *Per.* II 550C-D, Sh.-W.: 58....*Abyssus enim dicuntur [sc. primordiales causae] propter earum incomprehensibilem altitudinem infinitamque sui per omnia diffusionem, quae nullo percipitur sensu nullo comprehenditur intellectu praeque ineffabili suae puritatis excellentia tenebrarum nomine appellari meruerunt.*

<sup>36</sup> *Per.* II 552C-554C, Sh.-W.: 62-66, esp. 553C: *Spiritus ergo dei super tenebrosam abyssum causarum omnium primordialiter factarum superfertur quia solus conditor spiritus conditas causas cognitionis excellentia supereminet...*

<sup>37</sup> For a summary of his reflections on the opening words of Scripture, see *Per.* II 554C-556A, Sh.-W.: 66-70.

<sup>38</sup> See *Per.* III 622B-627C, Sh.-W.: 32-46.

<sup>39</sup> See *Per.* III 634A-690B, Sh.-W.: 60-188.

<sup>40</sup> It is especially because of its privative aspect that *nihil* must be eliminated. Cf. Boethius' various modes of predicating *natura*, of which the third bears resemblance to Eriugena's so-called definition. Describing nature, Boethius says: *Natura est earum quae, cum sint, quoquo modo intellectu capi possunt*, inserting *quae, cum sint* to exclude 'nothing' from

ing is of special importance for the interpretation of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*,<sup>41</sup> which had developed over the centuries into the touchstone of Christian orthodoxy.<sup>42</sup> In Eriugena's view the concept of 'nothing' is to be directly associated with God,<sup>43</sup> specifically in his capacity as the omnipotent cause of all things. It is from a superessential *nihil* that God created the primordial causes. In a subsequent volitional act he then created the multitude of their visible and invisible effects. With these visible and invisible effects Eriugena will next be concerned, as he goes on to discuss the development of *natura*'s third stage. In this stage, as a result of his arguments so far, the divine unity, which was retained in the multitude of primordial causes collectively created in the Divine Word, seems to become more and more eroded.

However, due to Eriugena's theophanic interpretation of the universe the bond between God and creation will never be broken completely. We have focused above (ch. 2.3.) on a striking passage from Book III where Eriugena confirmed their integrated union by inverting the natural order of 'cause' and 'effect'.<sup>44</sup> I wish to recall this passage here in order to illustrate that designations like 'cause' and 'effect' are ultimately irrelevant in a theophanic universe. It is for this same theophanic reason that Eriugena feels entitled to play down the outward discrepancy between God and creation, either as cause and effect or as subject and object, in favour of a much more dynamic and cohesive view of the universe (i.e. the divine appropriation of *natura* from within).

But if creation is from God, then God will be the cause, but creation the effect. Yet if an effect is nothing else but a made cause, it follows that God is made the cause in his effects. For what is foreign to its nature will not go forth from the cause into its effects. What erupts into heat and light is nothing else but the fiery power itself. (*Per.* III 687C, Sh.-W.: 182)

Despite the divisions subverting the strength of nature's unity, an innate

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penetrating this universal concept. See *Contra Eut.*, ch. 1, Rand-Stewart: 76-78. See also, D.J. O'Meara 1981: 126-131.

<sup>41</sup> For a Carolingian debate on the issue of 'nothing', see Fredegisus' *De nihilo et tenebris*, probably written between 804-814, which receives extensive treatment with regard both to its background and its contents in Colish 1984. See also Marenbon 1981: 62-66.

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. Augustine's treatment of it in Book XII of his *Confessions*, where he gives a commentary on the opening verses of the Bible. He there sees *nihil* as that from which God first created unformed matter, whereafter he made heaven and earth. Since this unformed matter was almost 'nothing', its making was not included among the days of creation. See *Conf.* XII, 3-9.

<sup>43</sup> It is by the Dionysian description of *non esse per excellentiam* that Eriugena appears to be most inspired in dealing with the problem of nothing. Cf. the discussion of *ea quae sunt et ea quae non sunt* in Book I.

<sup>44</sup> See Trouillard 1973.

divine power permeates its atmosphere and appears to hold it together. It is from one ubiquitous divine cause that all things incessantly derive their being,<sup>45</sup> just as warmth and light<sup>46</sup> continue to draw on the fiery power that generates them.<sup>47</sup>

If it were not for the integrating effects of theophany, creation and God would indeed form a flagrant paradox. This can be seen from their respective positions in nature's second division. In the particular configuration of this scheme God and creation seem fully to exclude each other, *natura creans et non creata* standing in diametrical opposition to *natura non creans et creata*. While the primordial causes still resemble the divine cause in being creative (though they are ultimately classified under created being), there is no other discernible point of contact between the first and the third species apart from their both being part of *natura*. The third species resembles the second (i.e. the primordial causes) in so far as it also carries the predicate *creata*, by which it must be distinguished from the divine cause of all things. In view of this radical contrast, it may be concluded that in the third species the dynamic movement of *processio* reaches its apparent completion. The breach between God and creation, representing oneness and multiplicity, is here at its broadest, the manifold effects of the third species forming a sharp contrast with their indivisible divine source.

The outflowing of *natura* culminates in the third species. Eriugena emphasizes this very effectively by diametrically contrasting this species with its divine model. Yet the most prominent feature of his analysis of *natura*'s third form is undoubtedly the genre in which it is cast. After an extensive summary of topics dealt with before and a long excursus on the meaning of the divine *nihil*, Eriugena comes to focus on the actual subject of Book III: the visible and invisible effects of God's unfolding. However, while treating of *natura non creans et creata* Eriugena unexpectedly passes on from a logical discussion of the division of nature to a scriptural interpretation of the divine creation process.<sup>48</sup> Beginning at Book III ch.24 the

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<sup>45</sup> With regard to this, see Eriugena's treatment of the divine Monad as the principle of generation inserted in the treatise on the divine nothing, *Per.* III 651A-661C, Sh.-W.: 100-124.

<sup>46</sup> When first introducing the concept of theophany in Book I Eriugena also makes use of the images of light and fire, both of which he seems to have derived from Maximus' *Ambig.* See *Per.* I 450A-B; 451B, Sh.-W.: 54; 56-58 (above ch. 2.3.). The same combination of images of fire and light is again found in *Per.* V 879A, where Eriugena speaks about the unification of all things in human nature, in which everything will have become spiritual and intelligible.

<sup>47</sup> See Jeauneau 1987b.

<sup>48</sup> This step has been prepared by the discussion of the opening verse of Scripture in Book II. However, I disagree with the hypothesis that the whole *Periphyseon* should be seen as a sample of *Hexaemeron*-literature. This view is proposed by Allard 1973. Gilson [1944] 1986: 204 seems also to have been of this opinion: "Pour se représenter exactement l'état

*Periphyseon* embarks on an exegetical exposition of the six days of creation described in the book of Genesis.<sup>49</sup> Though retaining its dialogue form, the *Periphyseon*'s discourse now takes on the well-known shape of a *Hexaemeron*.<sup>50</sup>

By following the course of events in Genesis as a 'leitmotif' in his analysis of the third species, Eriugena accepts the restriction of a pre-set pattern of divine words, with which all his speculations will have to be brought into harmony. This immediately raises the question of whether his ratiocination will not lose much of its original freshness and inventiveness. After all, his adherence to exegesis could considerably curtail the possibilities of a swiftly moving discourse. It could also constrict its range. The universal scope of the discussion between the Master and his Student had previously sanctioned the incorporation of heterogeneous topics, which ranged from an extensive treatment of the Aristotelian categories to a long and complex discussion about the status of the divine nothing. There seemed to be no difference between matters of faith, such as the position of the Trinity, and matters in which reason could roam about freely, as in the debate on the categories. The only restriction Eriugena seemed to accept stemmed from his care at all times to avoid presenting a state of affairs whereby God's majesty would be impeded by any limitations. .

However, apart from an apparent change of tone and to a certain extent of 'surface contents', in the all-embracing context of the *Periphyseon* Eriugena's transition to scriptural exegesis ought not to strike us as something completely out of the ordinary. When discussing the primordial causes Eriugena had already focused on the first two verses of Genesis, which he used to illustrate how these causes were to be connected with the divine Trinity. Thus he adumbrated a more elaborate usage of Scripture. Still, it is only when elucidating the function of the third species that scriptural exegesis becomes his constant theme. In Book III of the *Periphyseon* the six days of Genesis symbolize the completeness of the divine works. The literalness of the biblical narrative seems to correspond closely with the spatio-temporal materialness of created nature, the topic under discussion.<sup>51</sup>

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d'esprit d'Érigène il faut donc concevoir son oeuvre comme une exégèse philosophique de l'Écriture sainte".

<sup>49</sup> *Per.* III 690B, Sh.-W.: 188: "...Sed prius de senaria quantitate dierum intelligibilium in qua deus opera sua fecisse legitur si quod promissimus implere debemus breviter dicendum,..."

<sup>50</sup> As examples of *Hexaemeron*-literature see Basil of Caesarea, *Hom. sur l'Hexaem.*, *Sur l'orig. de l'homme* (Homelies X et XI de l'Hexaemeron); Ambrose of Milan, *Exameron*; Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt.*, *Conf.* Bks.XI-XIII.

<sup>51</sup> In Book III Eriugena rather seems to want to avoid giving anything but a historical exegesis, as if trying to prove his exegetical capabilities, before committing himself to allegorical exegesis in Book IV: see *Per.* III 693C, Sh.-W.: 196; *Per.* III 705A-B, Sh.-W.: 222.



For the time being Eriugena's method of exegesis may be referred to as allegorical in the most elementary sense. To illustrate the general concept of allegory we could point briefly to Augustine's definition in his *De doctrina christiana*. Augustine described the use of figurative speech there simply as: *aliud dicitur, ut aliud intellegatur*, indicating a difference between the letter of the biblical text and the subsequent meanings various interpreters can find in it.<sup>52</sup> In most of his exegetical views Eriugena seems inclined to explore the many connotations of this suggested 'otherness', as he reveals a notable tendency always to move away from the literal meaning of the text.<sup>53</sup> His ultimate concern is not so much the unadorned clarification of the text, but rather the attempt to find its spiritual meaning(s). It appears to him that these are of various levels of difficulty and obscurity for the human intellect.<sup>54</sup> The more difficult they are, the more valuable they are.<sup>55</sup> Thus the degree of complexity involved in allegorical exegesis seems ultimately to be the principal motive for Eriugena's fascination with it. The more obscure a text appears to the human intellect, the more hidden its spiritual meaning, the more Eriugena finds that he is forced to exert himself in order to make sense of the divine words and bring them into line with the outcome of his rational investigation of the universe.

This last point brings us to what is generally defined as the core of Eriugena's exegetical approach in the *Periphyseon*. For Eriugena, there is no need to assume a discrepancy between the autonomous research of the human mind and the meaning of the Bible as revealed through allegorical exegesis, notwithstanding the fact that the biblical texts themselves continue to have indisputable authority. The reason for this is that he postulates a fundamental analogy between Scripture and nature. In his long dialogue Eriugena often states how we can find in the book of Scripture

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In Book IV, however, he appears to have lost all interest in the historical meaning of the biblical texts under discussion, see ch. 4.2 and 4.3 below.

<sup>52</sup> See *De doct. christ.* III 37 56. Augustine utters this dictum in the course of explaining the rules of Tyconius (III 30 42–37 56). On Carolingian exegesis, see Riché 1984b.

<sup>53</sup> I take allegory here in the widest sense to include in it all aspects that Eriugena can discover in a text which are not 'literal' or 'historical'. The following comment on Augustine's use of allegory, which points to a parallel with his philosophical study, may illustrate this: 'The Bible had been similarly 'veiled' by God in order to 'exercise' the seeker. It was an acid test in just the same way as a philosophical problem might be: the superficial would be content with the obvious, with the 'letter'; only the profound man could grasp the deeper meaning, the 'spirit', Brown 1967: 261.

<sup>54</sup> Eriugena seems to have a preference for a particular concept of allegory, which is identical with *contemplatio/speculatio/theoria/theologia*. On this allegorical view derived from the Greeks, see *Comm. Ioh.*, Appendice III, Jeaneau: 398; *Hom. prol. Jean*, Appendice III, Jeaneau: 327–328; see also *Per.* III, Sh.-W.: 317, n. 43.

<sup>55</sup> See Jeaneau 1978 in Jeaneau 1987a: 221–242. There are innumerable instances where Eriugena uses expressions like *altior theoria*, *altior contemplatio*.

the exact same things that can be discovered by studying (created) nature, thereby implying an intrinsic correspondence. At other times he closely associates *scriptura* and *creatura* as two garments of Christ, indicating that underneath the difference of apparel the same contents can be found.<sup>56</sup> They both are ultimately dealing with the manifestation of the divine, *viz.* its gradual explication in created nature.

In my view, however, it is not so much the parallel development of *creatura*, or on a larger scale, *natura* and *scriptura* that should strike us as remarkable in the *Periphyseon*. Much more important in Eriugena's handling of the Bible is once again the key role human reason comes to play. Deciphering Scripture as it did nature, reason makes abundant use of the method of allegorical exegesis in order to transform the divine essence into effective knowledge.<sup>57</sup> Yet as before, there seems to be a deceptive quality in the independence of human reason. As with *natura*, in his views on exegesis Eriugena resorts again to what may be properly called the 'theophanic' appearance of biblical texts. Thus, in the manifestation of the divine, it is ultimately the same dialectical reciprocity between unattainable truth and tangible verisimilitude that rules the interpretation of the divine words, as it does the development of the divine deeds. In its aspect of escaping from a firm rational grasp, the unreachable divine essence can be seen actually to propel the dynamics of man's rational discoveries. At the same time, however, it relativizes man's rational conclusions with the qualification of *velut proprie*.

The awareness of the theophanic nature of Scripture prompts not only Eriugena's tenacious and inquisitive qualities, but also his careful and observant ones in describing the procession of the divine through the analysis of Scripture. To achieve the full harmony of reason on the one hand and scriptural (and patristic) authority on the other, Eriugena has to operate cautiously.<sup>58</sup> The words of Scripture, even the most obscure, have to be taken seriously and must be given full credit. It is for this reason that in the *Periphyseon* their interpretation may sometimes appear to be twisted, as Eriugena struggles to bring Scripture into accordance with human reason. Yet in view of the theophanic analogy of nature and Scripture, this exegetical procedure poses no real threat either to the credibility or authority of scriptural texts or to the effectiveness of human reason.

Despite his preoccupation with deeper meaning, the inviolability of the literal text remains always of paramount importance for Eriugena. It is ultimately the only guarantee that the Bible will come across in its true

<sup>56</sup> See Cappuyns 1933: 276-280. Cf. *Per.* III 690A, Sh.-W.: 188; *Per.* III 723B-724A, Sh.-W.: 262-264.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Per.* II 545B, Sh.-W.: 48.

<sup>58</sup> On the problems of reason and authority, see Cappuyns 1933: 280-290.

message and purport, no matter what interpretation one comes up with. Whatever the expositor's opinion may be, as long as he does not emend the words of Scripture, he cannot ultimately undermine the authority of the scriptural text. Although the authority of Scripture may be outwardly confining, indirectly it proves to be Eriugena's greatest rational incentive in exegesis. Given the incontestability of biblical texts, whenever there are unsurmountable differences between the text and the most obvious rational interpretation, reason is forced to apply all of its keenness in order to follow whatever turn the biblical phrase makes.<sup>59</sup> But the surprising fact is that it can safely do so. The authority of the scriptural text and the loyal transmission of its literal meaning being guaranteed, reason can virtually do as it pleases. That is, it can detect hidden meanings in the text and employ them freely. In this manner, Eriugena's method of allegorizing scriptural texts substantially increases reason's possibilities, as it can now safely develop its potential with the consent of divine authority. Even the compromises it may have to accept serve in the end only to expand its range of influence, thereby stretching its boundaries. It is through the self-imposed restriction of setting its arguments in a scriptural context that reason in fact taps new sources of success.

Although Eriugena at times struggles with the problem of scriptural authority, his method of exegesis goes a long way to neutralize the narrowing effects the scriptural text of Genesis could possibly bear on the free exercise of his rational faculties. According to Eriugena's allegorical views the six days of creation are intelligible days, which demand all our intellectual strength in order to sort out their meaning. After the authority of the scriptural text Eriugena must also observe the authority of the Holy Fathers, who have expounded the book of Genesis before him. Ultimately this will not thwart the development of his rational views.<sup>60</sup> The divine merit of the scriptural text will continue to preserve and safeguard man's intellectual freedom, rather than curbing it. In Eriugena's view the infinity of God, who in the person of the Holy Spirit has founded Scripture in the minds of the prophets, is poignantly reflected by the inexhaustible richness of meaning that is stored up in scriptural texts.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, there can be numerous, even contrary, interpretations of Scripture,

<sup>59</sup> See Jeauneau 1978 in Jeauneau 1987a: 243-283, chs. 2 (L'effort, le labeur), 3 (Le plaisir de l'esprit) and 4 (La prudence et la lenteur).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Per.* II 548D-549A, Sh.-W.: 54: *Non enim nostrum est de intellectibus sanctorum patrum diiudicare sed eos pie ac venerabiliter suscipere. Non tamen prohibemur eligere quod magis videtur divinis eloquiis rationis consideratione convenire.*

<sup>61</sup> *Per.* IV 749C: *Est enim multiplex et infinitus divinatorum eloquiorum intellectus.* Eriugena compares this richness of meaning to the feathers of a peacock, an image which Cassiodorus had used with regard to the Psalter (*Institutiones* I 4). On this image, see Jeauneau 1978 in Jeauneau 1987a: 68, De Lubac 1959: I 1, 123.

without one expositor necessarily having to disqualify another, at least as long as they are both in harmony with the tenets of Christian faith.<sup>62</sup>

If this basic condition obtains, one can even try to find new interpretations of one's own, because it is not ruled out that God may enlighten our minds so as to reveal new meanings to us.<sup>63</sup> In this manner the independence of human reason is brought out even more strongly. The very complexity of the texts of Scripture encourages this independence by providing it with ample scope for expression. Eriugena holds that God himself must have intended it this way, since he wants to be sought as well as found in his Scriptures,<sup>64</sup> which thus show their origin to be even more authoritatively divine than that of nature.

In the specific context of the *Periphyseon* the concept of allegorical exegesis which, placed in a rational framework, could have been used arbitrarily to fill in the gaps that were left by a literal or historical exposition of the Bible, gains an exceptional dynamic perspective. Based upon the premise that true reason will never contradict the message conveyed in Scripture, Eriugena's rational exploration of allegory becomes integrated with the larger course of his analysis of all-embracing *natura*. Thus it gives fresh impetus to his overall rational inquiry, allowing him to investigate and judge the various interpretations of Scripture it encounters and perhaps even to add new meanings to the ones already known. Eriugena's reflections on the study of Scripture bring out this particular role of reason in breaking new grounds most convincingly.

In accordance with the views developed above we should continue our inquiry into the relation of Scripture and nature in the context of the dynamic movement of *processio* and *reditus*. It was said that from Book III ch. 24 onwards, all of Eriugena's speculations on *natura* are moulded into the form of an allegorical exegesis of Genesis' account of the six days of creation. In other words, the *Periphyseon* becomes transformed into a *Hexaemeron*. More importantly, however, the *Hexaemeron*-part of the *Periphyseon* is fully integrated into the rest of its dialogue. I think we are justified in speaking of a seamless transition from philosophical discourse to allegorical exposition of a biblical text. There appears to be no apparent reason to separate the text following Book III ch. 24 from the foregoing, as if we

<sup>62</sup> See *Per.* III 690B-C, Sh.-W.: 188: *Infinitus siquidem conditor sanctae scripturae in mentibus prophetarum spiritus sanctus infinitus in ea constituit intellectus, ideoque nullius expositoris sensus sensum alterius aufert, dum modo ut sane fidei catholicaeque professioni conveniat quod quisque dicat,...*

<sup>63</sup> See the continuation of this passage, *Per.* III 690C, Sh.-W. 188: *...sive aliunde accipiens sive in se ipso, a deo tamen illuminatus, inveniens.*

<sup>64</sup> See the opening sentence of the same passage which introduces the *Periphyseon*'s *Hexaemeron*-section, *Per.* III 690B, Sh.-W.: 188. In it Eriugena says about God: *...ab eo qui illuminat nostras tenebras et quaerit se in suis scripturis quaeri et inveniri...* Cf. *Per.* II 599D, Sh.-W.: 166. See also above ch. 2. n.35.

were dealing with different levels of speech. The universality of the *Periphyseon*'s subject-matter embraces reason as well as faith, philosophy as well as authority.

If anything, the only difference we may possibly observe is that Eriugena's transition from strictly systematic reasoning to exegetical exposition sharpens the contrast between God, as the cause of all things, and the effects, as the concrete fruits of his creative operation. Consequently, the result of this switching of genres (which should be considered entirely voluntary on Eriugena's part), is that the divine origin gradually recedes behind its outward manifestation in the created universe. All that is now left of the divine origin lies hidden in the very words of Scripture.<sup>65</sup>

When explaining the relation between the second division, supplying the *Periphyseon*'s actual subject-matter as well as its leading principles of procession and return, and the *Hexaemeron*-form, one must note the following. It has been made sufficiently clear that Eriugena shifts to the *Hexaemeron*-genre in the immediate context of explaining and elucidating *natura non creans et creata*. This third species deals with the visible and invisible effects of God's creative power, which belong essentially to the material world of the senses. Eriugena regards the diversity and many-sidedness of these effects to be illustrated most powerfully by the rich and complete account of the six days of God's creative activity in Genesis. One would expect that, in its present *Hexaemeron*-form, the treatment of *natura non creans et creata* would come to complete the movement of *processio*, with the Genesis story of the six days of creation rounding up the effects of the divine *processio* of the universe.

As a significant feat of Eriugena's exegesis, however, the sixth day is omitted from Book III, which intimates that the process of divine creation has not yet completely reached its end. At this point we should be contented not to draw any inferences other than that it is apparently in the middle of the Genesis description of God's creative activities, spread out over a period of six days, that Eriugena locates the caesura between *processio* and *reditus*, between the analysis of the third species and the fourth. On close reading it appears that an explicit justification of the author's procedure is nowhere to be found. The only information we have on this issue

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<sup>65</sup> It is in this sense that I want to interpret the prayer found at the end of the *Periphyseon*. *Per.* V 1010B-C reads: *O Domine Iesu, nullum aliud praemium, nullam aliam beatitudinem, nullum aliud gaudium a te postulo, nisi ut ad purum absque ullo errore fallacis theoriae verba tua, quae per tuum sanctum Spiritum inspirata sunt, intelligam. Haec est enim summa felicitatis meae, finisque perfectae est contemplationis, quoniam nihil ultra rationabilis anima etiam purissima inueniet, quia nihil ultra est.* The understanding of Scripture may well be Eriugena's goal, yet it is unmistakably clear that this goal can only be reached by a rational, or more precisely a dialectical quest. See e.g. *Expos. in Ier. Cael.* I, 560-561: *Nulla enim sacra Scriptura est quae regulis liberalium careat disciplinarum.*

are his words at the beginning of Book IV, where the anticipated description of the sixth day of creation surprisingly enough introduces the movement of *natura*'s return to the divine and indivisible unity rather than the expected completion of its procession.<sup>66</sup> On arriving at the creation of man, Eriugena seems to want to move right on to the theme of *reditus*. It thus appears that we should attempt to reconstruct his train of thought on the remaining elements of nature's procession, to which man indeed would seem to belong, retrogressively from the beginning of Book IV.

### B. 'Inside' the Universe

This fourth book, which begins with the works of the sixth prophetic contemplation concerning the creation of the universe, forms the end, as it intends to consider the return of all things into that nature which neither creates nor is created. (*Per.* IV 743C)

After the description of the first five days under the heading of *processio* (or its equivalent: *divisio*), Eriugena introduces the theme of *reditus* at the beginning of Book IV of the *Periphyseon*, while considering the sixth day of creation. He must have found the realization of the return of creation to God hard to describe, let alone analyze. This fourth book, as the Master puts it, needs to be expanded into a fifth due to the prolixity of his arguments.<sup>67</sup>

At the opening of Book IV the Master anticipates the difficulties which he will come to face in the course of his speculations. His striking imagery here is noteworthy. He compares the problems involved in the notion of *reditus* with a stormy sea over which his ship would not be able to sail safely to its port, were it not for the protective and guiding influence of God's mercy and the prosperous breeze of the Holy Spirit. But reason, as the steersman on the ship, does not fear the storms or the dangerous cliffs. It simply wants to hasten on and quite frankly admits to enjoying sailing on a rough ocean for the purpose of training its strength, thereby irreverently turning its courage into what seems to be a dare-devil boldness. The imagery of the vast, raging sea is followed by another simile which compares Scripture to the earth that brings forth thorns and thistles. These reflect the obstacles which impede the attempt to uncover the intelligible meanings of the Bible. Just as according to God's command in Gen.3:17-19,

<sup>66</sup> Eriugena opens Book IV of the *Periphyseon* with a summary of the first three books, see *Per.* IV 741C-743C. In ch.2, *Per.* IV 743C he then tackles the problem of *reditus*.

<sup>67</sup> The so-called prolixity of his arguments is a recurring theme in the *Periphyseon*, see e.g. *Per.* III 742B, Sh.-W.: 306.

man must eat his bread in the sweat of his face,<sup>68</sup> so reason must study Scripture under cumbersome circumstances.<sup>69</sup>

These two images, so vividly evoked, both emphasize the toils and labours of reason in view of its imminent return to God. Whether depicted as cliffs rising up from a stormy sea to endanger a ship's safe voyage or as thorns on the earth, the return to God entails difficult problems, the solution of which will require all Eriugena's mental power and flexibility. Yet in both cases there is the tantalizing suggestion that the strength of reason may perhaps arrive at the immediate contemplation of the truth. As yet the moving force of God's grace is still indispensable, but reason's skill at navigation, its courage verging on recklessness, seem to be of almost equal importance.

The hardships reason will have to suffer are related to the return of nature, which seems to be indissolubly tied here to the fate of man. Before considering the *Periphyseon*'s interpretation of the sixth day of creation in detail, we should try to explain how Eriugena views the different aspects of Genesis as invariably pertaining to human nature. According to the book of Genesis, the sixth day is the last day of creation, and it is on this day that God in a final and culminating act created man, who for various reasons has a claim to being the most important creature in the universe. In the *Hexaemeron*-frame of reference of the *Periphyseon*, this means that man unquestionably comes to occupy a central position in the universe. In accordance with the many different aspects of his role in paradise, man's position is interpreted in different ways. In Eriugena's allegory of Genesis the following aspects to man's prominence in the universe can be broadly distinguished.

In biblical terminology man clearly stands out among his fellow-creatures, for it is only to him that the book of Genesis refers as *imago dei*. The fact that man has been created in the image of God sets him apart from all other creatures, making him absolutely superior to them. Resembling the divine, man should be seen as the pinnacle of created nature, vying even with the angels who cannot boast such a close connection with God.<sup>70</sup> There is in fact nothing ranked higher than man in all of

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<sup>68</sup> Eriugena deals with this same passage (Gen.3:17-19) at the end of Book IV, where he follows the exegesis of Maximus the Confessor. See *Per.* IV 856B-858B; cf. Maximus Confessor, *Quaest. Th.*, Sciscitatio V.

<sup>69</sup> See *Per.* IV, ch. 2, 743C-744B, of which this paragraph is a paraphrase. See further on this imagery, Jeauneau 1978 in Jeauneau 1987a: 243-255, ch.2 (L'effort, le labeur). See also Jeauneau 1987c on the imagery of the sea.

<sup>70</sup> In Book IV there is discussion of whether the angels are also made in the image of God (see my ch. 4.1.). In *Per.* III Eriugena touches on this subject, but in the end denies this claim, as he will do with even more intellectual force in Book IV. For his argument in Book III, see *Per.* III 732D-733A, Sh.-W.: *Ubi enim est ratio et intellectus, ibi imaginem dei*

paradise. This means that paradise falls completely under his authority.

Bearing the image of the divine and put in charge of creation, man functions in effect as a kind of intermediary instance between God on the one hand and the entire created universe on the other. Though he is an animal creature, he yet seems to transcend his created being, because of his affiliation with God. In the larger context of nature's return man thus reflects the essence of both worlds, since he incorporates the created and the divine elements.

I have here assembled these aspects of the role of man in a rather unsystematic way. Eriugena's exegesis of Genesis in Book IV, in general, uses man's character as *imago dei* to hint at his highly-perfected status. But the literary setting of the *Periphyseon* can also be seen to endow human nature and in particular its perfection with a more methodological function. In Eriugena's logical treatment of nature in terms of *divisio* and *analysis* (or their equivalents *processio* and *reditus* relating to a more linear impression of things), his dealing with man seems to mark an important transition. Although man must in one way or another signify the end of the outflowing and diversifying process (classified under the species of *natura creata et non creans*, man was indeed the last creature to be called into being through a volitional act of God),<sup>71</sup> yet in the context of Book IV he appears predominantly to form the point of departure for the inflowing and uniting process of nature, whereby the multitude of created things is brought back to God. The association at the beginning of Book IV between the treatment of human nature and the movement of return was fairly obvious. Therefore, however Eriugena may want to elaborate on the theme of *reditus*, it appears that the connection between the wide range of universal nature and the indivisible divine nature as the beginning, middle and end of all things, will ultimately be dependent on the complex notion of *humana natura*.

Though the discussion of man forms an integral part of the *Periphyseon*'s *Hexaemeron*, the role attributed to man cannot simply be dismissed as merely a result of Eriugena's allegorical interpretation of the sixth day of Genesis, however important that aspect may seem to be. Man's function

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*deesse nullo modo crediderim, solum tamen hominem ad imaginem dei factum manifeste perhibet scriptura. De Platone sileo, ne videar sectam illius sequi, qui diffinit angelos esse animalia rationabilia immortalia. Ad differentiam ergo humanae naturae ab angelica substantia relictæ sunt hae significationes, anima videlicet rationalis (Eriugena holds that the rational life of the angels is called 'intellect') et imago dei.*

<sup>71</sup> In *Per. IV* man's position as the last of the created effects is given adequate attention. It is even said to enhance his status in the universe, see *Per. IV* 782C-783A: *Proinde post mundi visibilis ornatus narrationem introducitur homo veluti omnium conclusio, ut intelligeretur, quod omnia, quae ante ipsum condita narrantur, in ipso universaliter comprehenduntur... Jam vero quoniam in fine omnium divinorum operum introducitur, omnia divina opera in ipso subsistere et comprehendere manifestantur.*



is determined more by Eriugena's overall view of nature. Since man is the first creature to be associated with the universe's return, it follows that the complete created universe will be funnelled into *natura non creans et non creata* through man as a sort of intermediate stage. In this capacity the creature of man assumes the role of having to lead creation back to its divine origin and thereby to perform the final act of *reditus*.

Given man's uncontested pre-eminence and his central position in Eriugena's dialectical system, one could question the extent to which man in this function is actually allowed to influence the development of the universe. At this point it is still unclear how Eriugena will turn the movement of procession into its countermovement of return and at what point exactly in this process the figure of man comes into play.

In addition, it is important to point to another aspect of man's role which is to be found in the *Periphyseon*'s fourth book. This imposes upon him yet another task. Moreover, it heightens his importance for the evolution of *natura* enormously. In the dialectically progressive view of *natura*'s development, revolving around the poles of *creator* and *creatura*, it might be expected that the mystical reunion between God and the created world would find its first expression in man. Man's pioneering role in the created universe as well as his close association with the theme of nature's return in Books IV and V, make Eriugena's espousal of this position virtually undeniable. In man as the epitome of creation, the notion of *reditus* thus proves to find its most marked expression, presaging the definitive removal of all obstacles that could possibly keep man from fulfilling his mediating task between God and creation. As a true and perfect representation of God on earth and a most dignified symbol of created perfection, man can successfully anticipate the completion of *reditus* only by actualizing the general return of the universe first within himself, that is, within the bounds of *humana natura*. In the reconciliation between God and man the all-embracing universe will find a foretaste of its eternal rest, though it still has to await full realization at the end of times. It appears that in man the eschatological state of the union of God and creation is anticipated.

As a tentative reply to the question of man's possible influence, I have shown various perspectives from which it should become clear that human nature functions as the so-called hinge of *natura*'s development. To make clear that the relation between man and nature is an integrated one, we can relate these different aspects of man's perfection to the progressive stages of *natura*'s development as follows. Firstly, since man is the culminating-point of God's creative activity (he is singled out to bear the divine image), he seems to crown and complete the movement of *processio*. Secondly, by linking the created with the divine man comes to function as

the actual turning-point between *processio* and *reditus*. This is emphasized by the connection of man's creation with the notion of *reditus* at the beginning of Book IV of the *Periphyseon*. Thirdly, by governing the created universe man will not only anticipate the return of *natura* but establish it in advance, for this return cannot be realized completely without the full guarantee of man's integrity. Therefore, however Eriugena may describe the final return of the universe, it will have to be through man. This turns man's position into a kind of bottle-neck for the author's argumentation. For this reason the position of man is by far the most difficult of Eriugena's speculative system to explain in full. In addition to the manifold aspects of the creature of man, the specific interrelation between philosophical arguments and biblical narrative will account for much further complexity in Eriugena's discourse.

Moreover, if we attempt to describe and analyze the position of man as a historical being in a spatio-temporal context and a prototype on the hierarchical scale of *genera* and *species*, the same biblical account of man in Genesis still raises difficulties. By telling the story of man's sin, it affects the consistency and integrity of human nature. It defiles man's highly reputable perfection, crucially causing an irreparable disparity between his state of being before and after his transgression. The story in Genesis presents the creature of man not only as much more perfect, but also as much more complex and fragile than any of his fellow-creatures. Because of the implied division of his nature into a prelapsarian and postlapsarian state, it becomes much less easy to fit man into the scheme laid down in Eriugena's overall *divisio naturae*.

To illustrate the seriousness of the effect of sin one only has to refer back to Eriugena's fifth *modus interpretationis* of being and non-being in the *Periphyseon*'s prologue. This fifth mode of interpretation was found to stand somewhat apart from the others, for instead of covering the complete realm of nature or created nature, it pertained to *humana natura* alone. Within the confines of human nature Eriugena wanted to trace a radical distinction between being and non-being depending on man's natural state of perfection: when in the state of sin, man is judged not to be, for on account of sin he has fallen from being into a kind of non-subsistence. However, through grace administered by Christ he can be restored to his former state of being. After much logical jugglery with which Eriugena had busied himself in the previous modes, the simple biblical description of man as *imago dei* was implemented in order to make possible the distinction between *esse* and *non esse*, because being was associated with man's original created state. Eriugena carried the disruption caused by sin so far as categorically to deny that man has being (to be taken here in the sense that through sin the natural affinity between ontology and intel-

ligibility in man had become disconnected) until he regains his lost honour. The fundamental dependence on and logical necessity of grace was further illustrated by a quotation from St. Paul's letter to the Romans 4:17: '*Et vocat ea quae non sunt tanquam quae sunt*'. It finally appeared that the breach between being and non-being as the result of sin could only be mended through the divine mercy distributed in baptism.<sup>72</sup>

Although we have already focused on this fifth mode of interpretation before, we should dwell on it again to stress the structural importance man's sin apparently reveals for the general evolution of *natura*. In Eriugena's view the breach within human nature cannot be dismissed as affecting merely a small compartment of the whole universe. Man's position in *natura* being crucial, his fall substantially affects the dialectical organization of the entire universe. Thus the breach in man can even go so far as to govern Eriugena's first division of nature as a valid universal criterion for distinguishing being from non-being.

Sin has damaged man's integrity as a creature, which is all the more serious given the kind of creature man is. Through sin man is no longer capable of performing the task that was implicitly imposed on him when he was first introduced as *imago dei*. His vicariate of God on earth, manifest in his giving of names and in his supervision of paradise,<sup>73</sup> becomes seriously undermined. After sin man is no longer able to pass the divine wisdom on to creation in the representative and accurate manner which was previously his exclusive right. Following Gregory of Nyssa, who compared man's role as *imago dei* with the reflection of a mirror, Eriugena was of the opinion that man could emulate the divine in creation in a manner bordering on perfection. For it is the nature of an image to be exactly like its model, the only difference lying in the fact that it is ultimately a created reflection and not the creative original.<sup>74</sup> Elsewhere Eriugena describes the difference between God and man by explaining that creation shares in the perfection of the creative divine nature, albeit indirectly, i.e. through participation.<sup>75</sup> Yet their natural affinity cannot prevent the radical break between God and man, between the creator and the most superior creature, which sin causes. Given man's position as a connecting-link between God and the created world, this implies that creation is in a sense cut loose from its origin.

The damage caused by human sin and consequently inflicted upon the

<sup>72</sup> See *Per.* I 445C-D, Sh.-W.: 44. See also ch. 1.1.

<sup>73</sup> See *Per.* IV 750D-751A.

<sup>74</sup> See *Per.* IV 788A-B (image of man as a *speculum*). See also Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, ch. 12, PG 44, 161C, Laplace: 133.

<sup>75</sup> See *Per.* IV 778A-B on the notion of participation. See also *Per.* III 630A-634A, Sh.-W.: 50-60.

whole of creation reveals even more serious and disruptive implications when we recognize that man not only mediates between God and creation as the culmination of creation, but also effectuates the return of the universe by accomplishing it first within himself. Human sin then takes on wide-ranging cosmological proportions. It seems effectively to disturb the harmony of the Eriugenian universe, which it was supposed to preserve and reflect. Human sin, besides having dramatic consequences for the perfection of man and that of creation, frustrates and counteracts the development of Eriugena's all-embracing nature. Just as man's perfection was meant to foreshadow the universe's final harmony, the echo of human sin now seems to reverberate through the entire Eriugenian cosmos.

Therefore, although God and creation form its constituent parts, for its effective unfolding universal nature appears to rely ultimately on the integrity of human nature. Man turns out to exercise ultimate supervision over *natura* as a whole, i.e. as regards its dynamic development through the unfolding of oneness into multiplicity and the subsequent return to simplicity. Forming in itself but a small section of *natura non creans et creata*, human nature in fact appears to be in charge of the entire operation of division and analysis, which in its concrete shape as the unique sequence of *processio* and *reditus* will lead up to the eschatological reunion of God and creation. In this dialectical process whereby man must pave the way for the whole created world, the biblical story of man's creation, his downfall and expulsion from paradise by its radical impact comes to transcend its original exegetical framework. It appears to function as a stylized narrative unit which prefigures nature's course of development by encapsulating the complete cosmic drama of harmony and destruction.

Given Book IV's exegetical context, it is not surprising that Eriugena wants to deal with the fall of mankind at great length. The ultimate aim of his analysis is undoubtedly the reconciliation of man and God. Through the vindication of man, he is able to prepare for the restoration of the complete universe with God. Within the larger perspective of the *Periphyseon*, however, we may perhaps suspect that Eriugena aims at even higher goals than these. In the *Periphyseon*'s universe man forms the most perfect part of the created world, and by retaining its perfection within himself he seems to represent all of creation.<sup>76</sup> If this is indeed the case, one is inclined to think that by focusing extensively on Adam's transgression of the divine commandment, the author's final purpose goes beyond

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Per.* IV 755B: *Constat enim inter sapientes, in homine universam creaturam contineri. Intelligit enim et ratiocinatur, ut angelus; sentit et corpus administrat, ut animal; ac per hoc omnis creatura in eo intelligitur.*

merely re-establishing man's intrinsic harmony. Rather, it may be surmised that Eriugena intends in effect to integrate creation with its maker in a seamless unity. At this point we touch precisely on the essential problem which Eriugena has to solve in Books IV and V of the *Periphyseon*. He now finds himself on the threshold not only of describing but also of actually performing the final cosmic act of *reditus*.

This suggests that Eriugena must strain his power of reasoning to its utmost boundaries, as he needs to unravel many problems before man can be reintegrated in an undamaged cosmic whole. But there is yet another aspect in Book IV which appears to put things entirely outside the realm of human control. Quite apart from the incredible efforts required of Eriugena's reasoning, what is involved here demands more than rational strength alone. As may have been gathered from the anthropological fifth mode of interpretation of being and non-being, Eriugena has professed man to be utterly dependent on divine mercy for the foundation and final justification of his being. If man, through sin, has disturbed the equilibrium of his own existence and thereby indirectly disturbed the ontological balance of the universe, this implies that *natura* ultimately requires a similar reliance on divine mercy for its effective unfolding.<sup>77</sup>

Just like man, on a larger scale all of the universe can be seen to manifest a structural dependence on God's grace. Thus the *Periphyseon*'s universe becomes a rare equilibrium of nature and grace, of reason and faith (in the sense of authority), of philosophy and religion. It is in this connection that Christ's Incarnation and his Redemption of mankind will also become closely associated with the theme of nature's return. Being himself without sin and cleansing all of mankind, Christ is the forerunner of man made perfect, on which the notion of *reditus* ultimately depends. His acts of grace, seen in the context of the *Periphyseon*, seem to have immediate cosmological effects. It is especially in Books IV and V that divine mercy and human reason, engaged in a combined enterprise, need to co-operate closely because Eriugena, contemplating *natura* under the final aspect of *reditus*, intends nothing less than the proof and establishment of the fundamental unity of the universe.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See the evocation of divine mercy in the beginning of Book IV, where it was before all the role of reason that was stressed. *Per.* IV 744A-B: A. *Tendenda vela, navigandumque; accelerat namque ratio perita huius ponti, . . . . . donec ad veritatis contemplationem, quam lapsu primi hominis periderat, frequenti literarum divinarum laboriosoque studio ducente et adjuvante et cooperante, et ad hoc movente divina gratia, redeundo perveniat, perveniendo diligit, diligendo permaneat, permanendo quiescat.*

<sup>78</sup> See the end of Book V, where in order to describe the final *reditus* Eriugena relies more and more on biblical parables. On the interpretation of these, see Jeaneau 1987d.

### C. Summary

We have pointed out the implicit connection between man and nature as a basic feature which not only defines the richness of the universe, but most of all influences Eriugena's description of this universe as an all-embracing complex. Within the flexible scope of *processio* and *reditus* (determining his overall perspective), Eriugena continuously changes his outlook on *natura*, as these built-in organizational directives enable him to bring about shifts of emphasis without destroying the whole. In the resulting cosmological description, which is after all the only way in which the Eriugenian universe can present itself to us, man occupies a central position, most of all because he functions as the turning-point between procession and return. Yet at the same time man also seems to form his own universe, in which he is subject to his own process of division and return. The description of man may follow various patterns, depending on how man's position in the *Periphyseon*'s universe is evaluated. Created in God's image, man is the undeniable culmination of creation. As such he forms not only the connection between God and creation, but ultimately foreshadows within himself the return of the universe.

The different and often divergent interpretations of man's position within the context of the *Periphyseon* form the central problem of Eriugena's anthropology. The *Periphyseon* wants explicitly to describe a rational investigation of the universe. Man occupies a central position within this universe, but he must also analyze and interpret it. When placed within the one context of nature, these various positions of man create the following dilemma. On the one hand man is an integrated part of universal nature and therefore subject to the same dialectical developments, on the other man stands somewhat apart as a self-contained creature foreshadowing and reflecting nature's dynamic movement and to a certain extent, it seems, even controlling it.

In view of the complexities that are involved in the interaction between man and nature, it is important to notice that there are different degrees of intensity to be traced in the relation between *homo* and *natura*. To do justice to this I want to broach the study of Eriugena's anthropology by discerning what I would like to call the various levels in the *Periphyseon*'s view of man. Rather than breaking up the structure of Eriugena's thought, however, they should be seen as richly variegated in themselves. They will enable us to approach man from different angles in the same context of nature, so as continuously to secure the intrinsic wholeness and perfection of both man and nature as interdependent worlds. Thus we will be able gradually to penetrate into Eriugena's view of man, seeking to arrive at its dynamic core. By differentiating between so-called levels or modes of interpretation while leaving the underlying unity of the

*Periphyseon* intact, we will in fact do no more than pursue a significant Eriugenian theme. He has himself applied this method by giving various explanations of *esse* and *non esse* in the work's prologue. Moreover, it seems that in this way we can do justice to the principal concern of all Eriugenian thinking, which is to preserve *natura*'s all-embracing character, the scope of which defies any attempt at definition. We should attempt to analyze the position of man within the context of *natura*'s unlimited sphere of influence, since man himself should reflect a similarly infinite range of possibilities when trying to realize the return to God.

Finally, before focusing on man explicitly, we must return once more to the issue of procession and return and man's role in it. As was pointed out above, man functions as the hinge between *processio* (and *divisio*) on the one hand and *reditus* (or *analysis*) on the other. Being the last creature created into this visible world, man completes and crowns the process of God's creation. In a sense he even adds to its very perfection by epitomizing all that has been made before. Nevertheless Eriugena locates man at the beginning of the movement of *reditus* rather than at the end of nature's procession. This implies that it is with man that the return to God should start, or, to combine the different strands of our argument into one conclusive view, it is with man that *processio* should turn into *reditus*. This means that human nature apparently generates the dynamic power for this developmental turn, by which nature, instead of moving further and further away from its divine origin, is directed back to God. In our analysis of human nature we will emphasize the complicated role of man in the dialectical development of *natura* by embedding *humana natura* (as the term Eriugena alternatively makes use of instead of *homo*) in the mainstream of *natura*'s overall evolution. In my opinion it is only by elucidating the interdependence between *humana natura* and universal *natura* that we can firmly grasp both these notions, as each of them seems to form its own constellation.

In Eriugena's description and analysis of universal nature as found in the *Periphyseon*, human nature forms the stage for the awaited transition from *processio* to *reditus*. It clearly takes part in both movements. However, before it can accomplish the return to God, human nature first destroys the unity of universal nature, through the act of sin causing a breach in its gradual development. Man thus turns out to be the living embodiment of the dialectical character of nature's evolution, as it were, by opposing *processio* and *reditus* to each other within the frame of his own nature. Because of this crucial role within the unlimited bounds of the universe, the analysis of human nature will provide an excellent perspective from which ultimately to return to Eriugena's concept of nature as a whole. Because of man's finite character as a *natura creata*, his analysis will not manifest

such elusive qualities as that of undefinable nature itself. Yet it will demonstrate most of the universe's typical traits, for man was said to contain the whole universe within himself, albeit on a created and reduced scale.

Even the divine outlook on the universe, which permeates the totality of *natura* to the point where it can no longer be isolated from it, appears to be accurately represented in man through his singular definition as *imago dei*. Man has in fact retained nature's theophanic aspect, which conditions his acclaimed function as a sort of nuclear universe within the universe of all-embracing *natura*. Most importantly, from man's position at the centre of the universe between *processio* and *reditus* we will undoubtedly get a clear impression of both these movements, their interrelation, their parallel development. This will then substantially contribute to our insight into the organic structure of the *Periphyseon*'s nature.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE UNIVERSE OF MAN: ITS PROCESSION AND RETURN

#### *Introduction*

#### *A. The Dialectical Universe of Man*

Our reading of the *Periphyseon* so far can hardly have failed to provoke a staggering amazement at the broad contours of the Eriugenian universe. Eriugena has chosen to call this outstretched cosmos by the name of *natura*, which, in the prologue to the *Periphyseon*, he professed to be the dominant subject of his rational investigation. Until now, therefore, *natura* has been at the centre of our attention. But once engaged in the study of Eriugena's account of nature, one becomes aware that the human mind, in carrying out the intended investigation of the universe, plays a most emphatic role in the *Periphyseon*'s argument. Man's rational understanding functions as the key instrument which not only equips Eriugena to dissect the universe for close investigation, but which, prior to any form of analysis whatsoever, helps him to construct the fundamental notion at all, i.e. *natura* conceived as an infinite whole. These observations have yielded the conclusion that in the *Periphyseon*, the universe, by which is indicated the complete span of its dialectical development, is essentially tailored to the scope of man's rational capacities.

As was made clear at the beginning of this study, my main interest in the *Periphyseon* lies with the role of man in the universe. Naturally this interest should increase only when the influence of man within *natura* becomes more apparent. Reflecting on the important participation of man in nature's development, I thus became convinced that the position and role of man deserved no less attention than the dazzling proportions of all-embracing nature. For a thorough evaluation of Eriugena's view of man *vis-à-vis* his concept of nature is definitely needed. However, as the fact that man has been seen to have some sort of grip on the universe's development gradually dawns, the question arises as to the precise range of his influence. After all, there is the possibility that we may have to adjust our views, and attribute the intimidating impression of the Eriugenian universe more to its vibrant centre, i.e. man, than to its impressive scope. I want to tackle this set of problems in the present chapter. Having dealt with *natura* extensively, it is time for man to advance to the scene of the action and become the focus of our interest.

What has been said above reflects this book's general view of man as the central principle of the *Periphyseon*. However, it is essential that any ideas developed in what follows should reveal complete accordance with what we have expressed in an earlier stage, namely that it is only through a careful and circumspect analysis of the interplay between man and nature that one may hope to accomplish an accurate interpretation of the *Periphyseon*. Some serious complications emerge in this study, when man functions in the context of an infinite universe. In particular, in the *Periphyseon* Eriugena does not make a clear-cut distinction between nature and man, as if they were mere equivalents of what one could call the object and subject of his rational investigation. To refute possible misconceptions that may emerge from a view of the universe as a compound whole, it should be made clear that, for Eriugena, unbroken nature continues to form the true horizon of his thought. His is an all-inclusive universe, whose most conspicuous feature appears to be that it is always in motion. Its procession from God continues down to the lowest effects and even beneath that, to include formless matter.<sup>1</sup> This procession then has a necessary corollary in the movement of nature's return, through which it ultimately strives for eternal rest in God.

Man's constitutive rational contribution, however distinctive it may be, can never be abstracted from this dialectical universe. To do so would severely undermine the implied effectiveness of nature's dynamic harmony, reducing the role of the universe to a static figment of the human imagination. Thus another of *natura*'s remarkable features, i.e. its elusive character as *theophania*, would be blatantly contradicted. Ultimately representing a manifestation of the divine, *natura* is known to surpass the boundaries of man's imagination altogether. It therefore extends beyond the confined scope of the rational investigation to which it is subjected. Man forms an integral part of *natura* and can only be studied against the background of its dynamic development. This is not to say that Eriugena does not, at times, distinguish between various aspects of man, such as his rational observation of nature<sup>2</sup> or his created participation in it.<sup>3</sup> But instead of compartmentalizing human nature, he considers these aspects as

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<sup>1</sup> For Eriugena's views of matter, see *Per.* I 499C-501B, Sh.-W.: 166-170. It is remarkable that God and matter, the highest cause as opposed to the lowest effect, should have certain traits in common as the two extremes of the scale of being, see Allard 1987: 243 ff.

<sup>2</sup> As is the case in Book I, where Eriugena is largely concerned with how to investigate the Cause of all things. In Book I the role of man seems to be that he is the subject of the investigation.

<sup>3</sup> As seems to be largely the case in Book IV, where man is the actual object of investigation. He is seen as a created effect, ranked alongside the other created effects whose coming into being is described in the first chapter of Genesis.

different human perspectives on universal *natura*. They serve as different attributes of the same underlying being.

After closely attending the progressive stages of nature's development, we now come to Book IV of the *Periphyseon*, where we find Eriugena explicitly reflecting on man. Thus this book appears to contain information directly relevant to the study of Eriugena's anthropology. In it the author undertakes a clarification of man's role in the universe, approaching his subject from all sides. In the previous chapter (ch. 3.2.) I have briefly outlined the problems we encounter, when analyzing this fourth book in the overall context of the *Periphyseon*. It was explained that the position of man is integrated with nature's dialectical development. It was also revealed that the discussion of man is set in an exegetical framework, as man is studied in the context of Eriugena's interpretation of the Genesis creation-narrative. In analyzing the role of man we will have to compare this *Hexaemeron*-structure of the latter part of the *Periphyseon* with the work's intrinsic dialectical framework, which will cause numerous problems. With so many confusing circumstances, the only firm lead Eriugena's dialogue can be seen to give us is the information that man is generally associated with the theme of the universe's *reditus*.

Eriugena has judged it necessary to introduce man in the context of describing nature's return, starting his reflections with the biblical narrative of the sixth and final day of creation, i.e. the day of man's origin. The creature man will henceforth dominate the stage of this fourth book. Man's location at the threshold of the return of *natura* cannot be explained away as a merely coincidental trait of the *Periphyseon*'s literary composition. In view of *natura*'s dialectical evolution, it suggests that man is definitely enmeshed in the process of leading nature back to God. He can further the restoration of nature's original simplicity in God. As yet it is not clear how man is to go about it. I have attempted to give an initial overview of human nature by pointing out its original perfect state. However, before developing a more precise analysis of the position of man, we must show how from the very beginning Eriugena's interpretation of man in Genesis seems to lay claims to contradictory qualities as well.

From a first reading of Book IV it appears that it is not a simple matter to make out the true character of the creature of man. Just as the Eriugenan universe, being continuously in motion, never betrays a static character, so the creature of man cannot be pinned down in any conclusive way. Man stands at the crossroads of *natura*'s development, as procession is about to turn effectively into its dialectical countermovement of *reditus*. We found this to indicate the dynamic role of human nature. Yet man appears to epitomize the universe's dialectical structure in a most confusing

manner. Eriugena's reading of Genesis does not hesitate to present human nature as the living embodiment of various contrasting qualities. To mention but a few: man's character as *imago dei* stands in flagrant opposition to his being created among the animals,<sup>4</sup> but, according to Eriugena's exegesis, both claims are simultaneously propounded in Genesis. We will see the *Periphyseon* repeatedly drawing attention to this biblical controversy.<sup>5</sup> The fact that man was the last of all creatures to come into being, seems to form a sharp contrast with another tenet of Eriugena's allegorical exegesis of Genesis, namely that man contains all of the created universe within himself.<sup>6</sup>

These contradictory statements are difficult for Eriugena to reconcile. His reading of Genesis complicates man's position in the logical development of nature. Still, in the end these contradictions seem not to endanger the unity of man's nature to any serious extent. In fact, they appear to have the reverse effect. Eriugena cleverly manipulates them. By virtue of the fact that such highly opposing qualifications are integrated into one being, man's general claim to perfection appears to be advanced. However, this should by no means be taken to imply that the well-rounded perfection of man, securing at all times his position over and above those of his fellow-creatures, remains altogether unchallenged. In a way, it seems as if man is more fragile precisely because of this perfection, which is only secured by the continuous maintenance of a balance. Notwithstanding all the created glory that was said to be his share, man eventually turns out to be unable to resist temptation, which drives him to perpetrate an irrevocable act of sin.

The emergence of the problem of sin in the *Periphyseon* could be accounted for simply by declaring it to be a mere result of the *Hexaemeron*-framework of the latter part of this work. This exegetical structure indeed necessitates the interpretation of the complete narrative of man's creation, to which Genesis attaches that ineluctable sequel containing the story of man's downfall and his expulsion from paradise. In view of the author's initial high praise of man's capacities (though they revealed more complexities than appeared at first sight), one might have suspected that human nature would set out immediately and unwaveringly to fulfill its par-

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<sup>4</sup> See *Per.* IV 750C: A. *Una itaque forma et inter cetera animalia de terra producit, ac mox ad imaginem Dei fieri perhibetur; quod merito me movet.* See also *Per.* IV 762B.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Per.* IV 756C-758B, where the Student combines the different elements of Scripture (man as the image of God *versus* man as a created animal) and opposes them to each other in a logical manner. This contradiction will ultimately lead the Master to apply the method of negative theology to man. He both is and is not an animal.

<sup>6</sup> See *Per.* IV 775B-786C *passim*. The first question of the Student is: *His itaque discussis non incongrue quaeritur, quomodo omnis creatura in homine est condita, cum ipse post creationem omnium factus fuisse perhibetur.*

ticular assignment. Man, in his capacity as a kind of outpost of creation and bearer of the divine image, would have led creation directly back to God. This offers what should still be considered the most plausible explanation for man's association with the movement of the return from the very beginning of Book IV.<sup>7</sup> However, the occurrence of human sin distorts the intended course of events and thus it poses definitely the most difficult problem for Eriugena's anthropology. As it is an undeniable effect of sin to compromise the integrity of human nature, Eriugena is forced to analyze the position of man much more closely. Whatever the precise reason for its presence in the *Periphyseon* may be, the problem of sin radically affects the determination of man's ultimate position. By disturbing the original yet delicate balance of contrastive qualities, the very hallmark of human completeness, it also complicates the efficacy of man's involvement in the process of *natura's* return.

The tragedy of sin, according to Eriugena's interpretation of the Genesis-story, is that man, beyond doubt the most perfect specimen of *natura creata et non creans*, cannot live up to the standards of perfection that go hand in hand with the unique position of his being. Endowed with a free will,<sup>8</sup> man wittingly allows the act of sin to break up the intrinsic unity of his being. The problem of human accountability, therefore, cannot be avoided. Furthermore, given man's crucial role as a being integrated with the development of *natura*, the harmony of the entire universe is not left untouched. The stability of man's position becomes seriously disturbed, because the balance of his contrasting qualities wavers. Since man's general role in nature cannot be isolated from his specific function on the threshold of nature's *reditus*, the effect of sin will thereby come to influence the dialectical flow of nature's return. It is at this point that sin appears to have the most direct and dangerous impact, for by inhibiting the execution of the return, it prevents the universe from reaching its final resolution. Since every procession can only function in connection with the return that inevitably follows, human sin threatens completely to erode the dialectical structure of nature.

Seen in this light, the problem of sin appears to be of paramount importance, not so much because of obvious theological reasons (i.e. as an exegetical obstacle brought up by Eriugena's close following of Genesis for his interpretation of man), but most of all because of what may be called its negative dialectical 'charge'. In view of *natura's* impending return,

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<sup>7</sup> Note that the association of man with the theme of return does not imply that man's being was immediately tainted by the implications of sin. It is not man's act of sin that brings about the connection with the theme of *reditus*. The *reditus* starts out with the creation of man, not with his committing sin. Thus it seems to be embedded in human nature as a whole.

<sup>8</sup> On free will, see *De praed.*, chs. 6 to 8.

the most urgent consequence of the occurrence of human sin is that it necessitates an immediate and effective remedy. Because man's integrity has been utterly defiled, the implication for Eriugena is that man needs to be cleansed so as to be salvaged for his larger cosmic role. If we can indeed accept that *natura* pivots around human nature as its vibrant centre, located precisely at the turn in its development, we must be well aware that what we are dealing with is a human nature whose perfection is deeply modified on account of sin.

The dialectical 'charge' of sin, besides having an undeniably subversive impact, seems also to affect the *Periphyseon*'s view of nature in a more positive way. Sin above all impinges on the integrity of human nature and of universal *natura* by requiring treatment. It stimulates Eriugena to search for ways in which he can mend the breach. In this manner the problem of sin can be seen to function as a kind of catalyst for *natura*'s eschatological apotheosis in the *Periphyseon*. One may indeed wonder what, in the imaginary case of an eternally impeccable human nature, would have stopped the universe from going around in endless circular repetitions. What immense weight of argument could have provided the much needed counterpoise to the rotating dialectic of procession and return, coercing the universe finally to plunge into the mysterious abyss of *natura non creans et non creata*? Although I do not want to draw any premature conclusions, it should be made clear that the disintegration of human nature and, in consequence, the urgent necessity of Eriugena's repairing it, helps to develop a unidirectional vision of *natura* in the *Periphyseon*. It is on account of human sin, which affects the unity of the universe by breaking up human nature, that Eriugena traces a visible difference between the beginning and the end of nature's development.<sup>9</sup> In addition, his attempt to solve the problem of sin helps us to uncover the still ambiguous identity of the fourth species of nature. Because it severs most radically all ties with the preceding stages, sin hastens the attainment of God in this his most mysterious form. Thus it will bring us face to face with *natura non creata et non creans*.

In view of the all-pervasive influence of sin, I want to pursue the study of Eriugena's anthropology by concentrating on this caesura as our central point of reference. In general, sin brings out most clearly the dynamism of man's role in the Eriugenian universe, because it cuts straight through man as well as nature. In taking human sin as our point of departure, we will not only elucidate man's specific role in the universe, but ultimately

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<sup>9</sup> The same function of distinguishing between the beginning and the end of nature's development seems to be performed by the historical dimension of paradise. Although Eriugena clearly prefers an allegorical view of paradise, he is nevertheless careful not to deny its historical aspects altogether, see *Per.* IV 818A-B.

also strengthen his ties with it, since the breach caused by human sin weighs directly on nature. Given the context of Eriugenian dialectics, this approach to human nature through sin could have a remarkable impact, which may considerably diversify our understanding of man in the *Periphyseon*. We have seen how sin, in its function of a dialectical catalyst, radically affected man's position in the universe. As has been pointed out, this dialectical 'charge' of sin reveals both a negative and a positive facet. Although it definitely destroys the unity of man's being, it also seems to 'open up' human nature by changing man from a created effect into a being with a dialectical dynamism. It is through sin that human nature becomes more and more involved in the dialectical course of *natura*. This seems to inaugurate a new situation in our analysis, to the effect that man, in order to perform his function in the return of the universe, will first have to go through his own dialectical development. On account of sin man changes from a being with a fixed position on the hierarchical scale of *genera* and *species*, into a being that is subjected to a development of his own. Under the pressing influence of sin, man appears to constitute his own universe, which is definitely tainted by the disaster that has befallen it. The *Periphyseon* dialectically expresses this because man, before being able to lead creation back to God, has to pass through his own stages of procession and return. Functioning within the scope of all-embracing *natura*, the universe of man forms only a small *nucleus* within nature's infinite whole, yet its structure is essentially the same.

Taking this specific configuration of a universe of man within the universe of nature as this chapter's overall guideline, I have designed a schematic lay-out of the dynamics of Eriugena's anthropology in which man is conceived of as a being of an intrinsically dialectical character. Man must pass through his own stages of *divisio* and *analysis* or, for that matter, *processio* and *reditus*, which run side by side with those according to which Eriugena has arranged *natura*. In man's continuous development, the breach caused by sin forms the only fixed point, since it seems to indicate where the movement of his return should start. Initiating the return of man, human sin thus begins the return of the complete universe. So we develop a picture in which man and the universe form two concentric circles, so to speak, which act as two interdependent constellations pivoting around the axis of human sin. As nature and man are now ranked as equals, it is possible to compare them despite their unequal stature. More importantly, however, they both appear to manifest the same dynamic character. Just as the universe's *processio* involves an outflowing movement in the first three species of nature, so man's *processio* concerns his coming into being as narrated by Genesis. Just as the universe will at the end of times return to *natura non creans et non creata*, so man's *reditus*, the

need of which emerges urgently after sin has defiled the integrity of human nature, will be the restoration of his original state of perfection. For both nature and man it appears that the eternal rest in God must be Eriugena's overall aim.

Since man is positioned on the threshold of nature's return, it may rightly be suspected that, of man's singular development of procession and return, the movement of his return will be of more interest to us. Not man in general, but specifically the *reditus* of man will inaugurate the return of the complete universe. In view of this approaching return, we can see the cosmic worlds of man and nature drawing ever closer together. In this perspective even more seems to depend on Eriugena's final solution to the problem of human sin. Sealing the fate of man, it will not only condition the fate of all of *natura*, but also bring man and nature finally together. The restoration of man's integrity serves as the exclusive model for the universe's future rest in God, thus defining the close connection between human *reditus* and universal *reditus* in terms of identity rather than synchronicity.<sup>10</sup> Since it is solely through the rehabilitation of man that the final stage of *natura non creans et non creata* can be obtained, we have reached the point where anthropology and physiology completely coincide. It seems as if the two concentric circles have slowly been telescoped into each other, so that they now seem congruous. The broad contours of *natura*'s infinity have shrunk to the point where they are indistinguishable from the ever-expanding boundaries of the universe of man.

### *B. Three Anthropological Levels*

To carry out this study of Eriugena's anthropology (i.e. his view of man in the context of how *natura* unfolds),<sup>11</sup> I intend to proceed as follows. In order to give a fully-fledged account of the dynamism of Eriugena's view of man, I have distinguished three anthropological levels within the larger framework of his general philosophy of nature. It is through the exposition of these that man's increasingly dominant role in the *Periphyseon*'s universe will be adequately demonstrated.

Before explaining how exactly the distinction of these levels may help us to unravel Eriugena's anthropology, I want to delineate how they interlock to create a coherent view of man's growing impact on the process of nature's return. In the context of the *Periphyseon*'s general outlook on na-

<sup>10</sup> At the end of Book V the *reditus* can be seen to end with the blessed state of man, which occurs after universal nature has found its rest by returning to its primordial causes. See *Per. V*, ch.39, 1019A-1021B.

<sup>11</sup> For scholarly treatments of Eriugena's anthropology, see: Mathon 1964; Stock 1967; Bertin 1977; McGinn 1977; Moran 1989: 154-185.



ture, man initially appears firmly to occupy a position among the created effects. However, as we explain the particular implications of his function in the universe, we will see man getting more and more wrapped up in the *reditus* of the universe. As he is the last creature to be called into being on the last day of creation, and the only one to be created in the image and likeness of God, he can be said distinctly to conclude the movement of *processio*. Through this he indirectly inaugurates for Eriugena the theme of return. Yet we cannot explain man's association with the return of nature simply as imposed by the logic behind Genesis' chronological order of events, -it is with the last creature to come into existence that the movement of return should start. In view of the dialectical structure of nature's development, there appears to be a much more functional interpretation of man's pioneering role in the process of return. Being exclusively adorned with the epithet *imago dei*, man is set somewhat apart from the rest of creation. This suggests a superior position, and in consequence, this accounts for his being attributed a mediating role between God and creation. In his capacity as a sort of intermediary man generally seems to cover middle-ground between the realm of the created and the realm of the divine,<sup>12</sup> thereby assuming a more active task in attempting the attainment of nature's return. He is charged with leading creation back to God by leading it first back to the unity of his own nature.<sup>13</sup>

These are two of the three specifications of the increasing impact man has on all-embracing nature. Although these aspects are of undeniable importance for the impending *reditus* of nature, Eriugena still needs to

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<sup>12</sup> For man's mediating role in creation, see *Per.* II 530C, Sh.-W.: 16: *Huius rei gratia novissimus introducit in his quae sunt homo veluti coniunctio quaedam naturalis universaliter per proprias partes medietatem faciens extremitatibus et in unum ducens in se ipso multum secundum naturam a se invicem distantia spatio* (quotation from Maximus' *Ambig.* PG 91, 1305B-C). For the background of the use of *medietas*, see *Hom. prol.* Jean, Jeaneau: 294 n.1. In Book II, paraphrasing Maximus, Eriugena brings out man's mediating role between God and creation as follows: *Itaque quoniam clare vides divisionem naturalem omnium a creatore et creatura inchoantem et in homine qui in summitate divinae operationis veluti in senaria quadam perfectione conditus est desinentem, iam nunc substantiarum omnium adunatam collectionem ab homine inchoantem et per hominem ascendentem usque ad ipsum deum qui est totius divisionis principium totiusque adunationis finis...videamus* (*Per.* II 531C-532A, Sh.-W.: 20). On Maximus' fivefold division of nature, of which man forms the middle part, see Thunberg 1965: 396-459; Jeaneau 1980 in Jeaneau 1987a: 361-364. For Gregory's views on man's mediating role, see *Per.* IV 795B: *Duorum quorundam per extremitatem a se invicem distantium medium est humanitas, divinae videlicet incorporalisque naturae, et irrationabilis pecudalisque vitae*, cf. *De hom. opif.* PG 44, 181B-C, Laplace: 155.

<sup>13</sup> The first stage of the process of return is the return of all of nature to man. Cf. *Per.* II 532A-B, Sh.-W.: 20, where Eriugena paraphrases Maximus: *...Quoniam substantiarum divisio quae a deo sumpsit exordium et gradatim descendens in divisione hominis in masculum et feminam finem constituit, iterum earundem substantiarum adunatio ab homine debuit inchoare et per eosdem gradus usque ad ipsum deum ascendere...*

describe the final step. For the return of creation can only take place when man himself has managed to accomplish the return to God. Thus we will have to penetrate even further into Eriugena's universal theory of *natura* and the role of man therein. We then reach the stage where man is found fully to absorb creation, as a last prerequisite before he can establish the complete unity of all things in God. The achievement of the return of the universe through man appears to be successfully effectuated when we find Eriugena speaking about man as the reflective universe of all created things.<sup>14</sup> It is clear that creation can only be restored to God through man and it is through this last and most intensive view of man as the receptacle of creation, that man's return will automatically involve the return of *natura*'s complete whole. Here human nature finally rises to form the stage for the sweeping apotheosis of *natura*'s course of development.

On this view the *reditus* of nature will be immediately completed upon the return of man. Eriugena needs to adjust his explanation of Genesis to accord with this most demanding role for man in the universe, interpreting man's appearance on the sixth day in an altogether different light. Eriugena explains that the purpose of man's coming into being as the last creature was ultimately not so much that by the very fact of arriving last man would complete God's act of creation as its final effect, but rather that man was intended worthily to represent all foregoing creatures within himself.<sup>15</sup> This seems to make his position in the Eriugenian universe a virtually impregnable stronghold. Creation needs man if it is to be funnelled into the fourth species of *natura non creans et non creata*. But it needs man even more to persuade God upon his return to establish the universe in a state of eternal rest. With this anthropological outlook, where man and the created universe have become indistinguishable, if not interchangeable quantities, the bonds between man's return and the restoration of *natura* as a whole are in fact unbreakable. Man's return to God not only adumbrates the long awaited unity of the whole universe, but essentially warrants it.

However, the manifold ties binding man to the progressing *reditus* of nature in Book IV of the *Periphyseon* are not so easy to untangle as may have

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<sup>14</sup> This role of man as centre of the universe, containing it within himself, can be illustrated adequately through a poignant term which Eriugena adopts from Maximus the Confessor, who in his *Ambig.* had stated *homo officina omnium*. In his capacity as a so-called workshop (in Greek: ἐργαστήριον, PG 91, 1305A), man contains the ensemble of the created universe within himself, just as an artisan's studio contains all the tools and materials required for putting together the definitive work of art. Though this idea is definitely present in Book IV (cf. 755B), the word itself does not occur here. It can be found e.g. in Book II, see *Per.* II, 530B-D, Sh.-W.: 16-18 (where Eriugena comments on Maximus). See also *Hom. prol. Jean*, Jeauneau: 297 n.2.

<sup>15</sup> *Per.* IV 782D-783A.

been suggested in the above. One of the factors that complicate the picture is the problem of human sin. This has the effect of making man's position on the hierarchical scale of the universe far less certain, while on the other hand it increases man's specific importance for the accomplishment of the dialectical twist by which Eriugena must contrive to bring *natura* back to God, i.e. the turn of procession into return. A further complication arises when it turns out that Eriugena has nowhere in the *Periphyseon* systematized his anthropological speculations. Instead he has cast them in the general and loosely organized framework of an allegorical exegesis of the Genesis narrative. Varying with the exegetical liberties he wishes to take, Eriugena's descriptions and interpretations of man alternate without noticeable structure. The aforementioned decision to distinguish different facets of man as typical of his growing influence on the universe's development can still be defended, however, on the grounds that it will do justice to Eriugena's dynamic thinking. Indeed, it seems we will bring out the dynamics of his philosophy far better by capturing various moments in man's swirling becoming rather than cutting out segments of his being. As has been said before, Eriugena's concern was never with a schematic layout of a metaphysical universe, but always with the overall development of *natura* towards its final unity in God. Thus he can safely approach the figure of man from different perspectives. As man's bearing on the return of the universe is of a fluctuating intensity, he appears to throw in various interpretations without ever showing any fear of substantially undermining the essential unity of man's existence. We must be well aware all the time that Eriugena's interest is primarily concerned with the integrity of *humana natura* as a whole, i.e. as a counterweight to universal *natura*, and not with a heap of individual accomplishments of man. Therefore, it is with a constant eye on the close connection between man and the infinite universe in an unfolding development that one should study the *Periphyseon*'s anthropology.

To make all this more concrete, I want to proceed as follows. I shall focus on three different interpretations of man, the ensemble of which indicates the importance human nature can be seen to have in the larger framework of the *Periphyseon*'s natural universe. Taking as my starting-point a view of man as a creature in the infinite universe, I will portray the stunning variety of his roles, which represent, as if marked on a vertical scale, the increasing implications of human nature for the process of nature's return. I will expound my view of this issue using the anthropological levels that have been distinguished as recognizable points of reference to facilitate the analysis of man, whose position within the universe appears to be of ever-growing dominance. The dynamic character of Eriugena's anthropology as well as of his entire physiology call for the utmost

clarity of expression. In view of the diversity of man's functions, the boundaries of each of man's specific positions in the process of nature will have to be indicated. For this purpose we must attempt to describe the movement of human procession and return on each level, taking into account that sin has disturbed the balance of man's original position in the universe and threatens to undermine nature's harmonious development. Having thus gained a clear vision of how man's restoration is understood to be carried out, we may then undertake to give a final assessment of man's position on each level, measuring the extent of his actual contribution to the overall process of nature's return.

Once we have explored the tentative reach of Eriugena's alternating anthropological interpretations, each in turn will then be made the focus for a certain perspective on the whole of the universe, its general structure and its imminent resolution in the fourth species of *natura non creans et non creata*. We will thus on each of these levels be provided with a cross-section of *natura*, i.e. its procession and return revolving around the central creature of man. The interrelation of these various levels is the final question we will now have to deal with before undertaking the actual analysis.

Eriugena's view of man has been purposely presented as covering three different levels. On each of these we will receive a full overview of man's procession and return. The reason why it is nevertheless necessary to describe the sequence of all three is to illustrate accurately the increasing intensity of the relation between the universe of man and the universe of *natura*. In my view each of the anthropological perspectives that have been singled out prompts a fundamental intensifying of Eriugena's view of man. This deepening of man's role in the universe represents a process by which the boundaries of man gradually come to match those of the entire universe.

It is as if, starting out from man as a single being on the hierarchical scale of *species* and *genera*, we then, by degrees, zoom in on this creature. The effect of this focusing is that man gradually takes over the scene of the action in the development of nature. Man was originally surrounded by a universe of dazzling proportions, but little by little we see the universe recede or rather fade into the background, until it has become totally conformed to the shape of man. The different anthropological stages which have been discerned specify the interrelation between man and nature at a given moment in nature's development, as the universe is slowly being reduced to its central principle. The span of human dialectical development thus covered ranges from the moment at which man comes into being as the last creature (*imago dei*), through the stage in which man and nature appear to have the same dimensions, to the last phase where all of nature has imperceptibly crept into the human figure. It is

through this process of an 'unfolding' of human nature until it fills the cosmic universe that man's dynamic flexibility is most powerfully revealed, for by operating in the context of an unlimited dialectical nature, he is forced to exploit the full extent of his possibilities.

Notwithstanding the validity of the above arguments, there appears to be a prominent stumbling-block which at all times protects the final impenetrability of Eriugena's anthropology. This is the motif of theophany, which was also found to lie at the basis of the *Periphyseon*'s dialogue as a whole. The theophanic character of *natura* hinders every attempt to gauge the final depth of the *Periphyseon*'s arguments, for nature must always retain an elusive quality. This remarkable theophanic outlook of Eriugena on nature has, as was described in chapter 2.3. of this study, very much the effect of a 'trompe-l'oeil'. One is given the impression of a true and adequate description of reality as ultimately divine, while at the same time the overall inaccessibility of God is constantly preserved. As the *Periphyseon* nears its final solution and the dialectical plot of procession and return thickens, the creature of man seems to remain the only vehicle for discussing the unsolved problems that are left, i.e. before nature plunges into a state of eternal stillness in God who, in his capacity of *natura non creans et non creata*, can only be silently revered. Thus for a brief moment the entire universe in all its infinity seems to contract to a single point. It is man who comes to bear the sole burden of the universe's return.<sup>16</sup>

During this short interval man not only represents the span of his own development, but also that of nature as a whole, of which he still continues to form an integrated part. We are confronted here with a situation comparable to that of a contrapuntal harmony. The development of man and nature are found to be completely interdependent. This necessarily puts a strain on the *Periphyseon*'s discourse, embarrassing its author as much as its readers. Readers of this work must cope with the problem of the *Periphyseon*'s digressional style, which seems to contradict itself on the issue of man more than on anything else in this dialogue. The author, on the other hand, needs to struggle with an accumulating number of problems conjured up by the pressing need to bring *natura*'s course to a satisfactory end, leading the created universe first back to man and then from man back to its original source in God.

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<sup>16</sup> This can be illustrated by a passage in *Per.* III 650B, Sh.-W.: 98, where in a prayer Eriugena asks God not to deceive man by 'empty phantasies' as opposed to his true manifestation: *Ostende te ipsum his qui nil petunt praeter te. Rumpe nubes vanarum fantasiarum quae mentis aciem non sinunt intueri te eo modo quo te invisibilem videri permittis desiderantibus videre faciem tuam, quietem suam, finem suum ultra quem nil appetunt quia ultra nihil est, summum bonum superes-sentiale.* The attainment of God is the only true aim of the *Periphyseon* and man is in fact the only creature who can perhaps successfully achieve this return.

It has been made clear that man forms the junction of all nature's lines of development, whether they are linear or dialectical, progressive or circular. As we continue with the analysis of the *Periphyseon*'s view of man, the divergent aspects of human nature will be unravelled only to be reintegrated eventually into one dynamic picture of man. This will then bring us face to face with what can be considered the final question of Eriugena's anthropology. Evaluating man's position in the universe, we must try to discern whether he drifts along with the tide of *natura*'s course of development, or whether he actually exercises some sort of control over his own destiny, and maybe even *natura*'s. The study of Eriugena's views on man in Book IV is intended to lay the groundwork for the definitive solution of this problem. But before formulating a final answer, we will also have to turn to Book V, which contains the continuation of Eriugena's diagram of the return into *natura non creans et non creata*. Finally, we will have to reconsider the delicate balance between the outstretched infinity of *natura* and the dominant principle of man, for as yet we have not determined from what energetic source the flow of Eriugena's arguments ultimately springs.

I admit that our approach in this chapter may take things further than Eriugena himself did and perhaps even wanted to do. But that I think ultimately is only a matter of perspective, as such an approach is justified by that same mantle of theophanic disguise, which covers the reality of all things. If Eriugena, in a theophanic light, could judge it legitimate fully to reverse the order of the created and the divine by making the latter eternally dependent on the former, why not then assume that it is also legitimate to make the dialectic of nature rely on the principle of man's participation, especially since this will only be a temporary measure? Even if we have ultimately to adjust our views, this procedure could well serve a very useful purpose. Among other things, it may help us to see through the nebulousness of Eriugena's language, which blends the biblical with the philosophical, the literal with the metaphorical or allegorical. I think his procedure in these matters can be better understood, if we try to explain the shades of meaning human nature can take on, the various angles from which it allows us to approach nature. Together they reflect the varying intensity with which Eriugena evokes the universe and allows man to play a prominent part in it. If we have previously been exalted by the soaring dimensions of the divine, which have remained beyond Eriugena's grasp despite the negative and the theophanic approach, we will now be closely attending the steady growth of a single creature. Although this diminishes the intimidating infinity of *natura*'s proportions to no small degree, we may experience that the reach of man will make up in depth for what it lacks in width.

However, we will ultimately have to go beyond every proposed schematic and thereby too definite outlook on man's dynamic position in the universe, and content ourselves instead with the state of affairs as presented in the *Periphyseon*'s dialogue. One may ask, therefore, what we will gain by dissecting the universe into parts when we have no evidence that it was originally constructed from them. If anything, it may be expected that we will receive a more direct impression of the dialectical structure of the universe by shifting from the infinite to the finite, the elusive to the concrete, the perfect to the sinful. This is precisely what we seem to be able to achieve most effectively by reducing the transcendent infinity of the divine to the manageable stature of human nature. Yet the aim is by no means to transform the universe from a dynamic into a static one, or to diminish in any way the dialectical potential of Eriugena's ratiocination. In fact, we will bring out the dynamics of Eriugena's universe much more clearly by dealing with a dynamic creature located at the core of *natura* than by attempting to circle *natura*'s confines, which by nature transcend all definition.

Concentrating on the universe through the eyes of man, we will be able to observe the laws to which Eriugena's universe is subject, without running the risk of being completely swept away by its overwhelming proportions. Describing Eriugena's anthropology may thus appear to be something like creating a 'cinematographic' portrait of nature, the observance of a prudent distance enabling one to apply an altogether more liberal and imaginative approach. There need be no fear of severing the intrinsic ties between man and the universe, even if we make a free transition from man's participation in the universe to man's vision and actual control of it. After all, man is fundamentally a rational creature and it is the principle of rationality that has been identified as the main motivating force behind Eriugena's concept of nature. This both implies and guarantees the compatibility of man and the universe at all times.

#### 4.1. *Man as Object of Natura Creata. An External Approach to Human Nature. Periphyseon IV chs. 3 to 6, 11 to 15*

*...quia ita voluit eum condere, ut quoddam animal esset, in quo imaginem suam expressam manifestaret. (Per. IV 763C)*

##### A. *The Position of Man*

The first stage of our analysis of Eriugena's anthropology deals with man as he is placed in the immediate context of Genesis. By this I mean that we should try to follow how Eriugena explains the events surrounding

man's creation, whereby he sticks to the precise order in which they emerge on the surface of the Genesis text. The central aim thereby is to give a clear view of Eriugena's biblical exposition in order to prepare its final integration with his overall view of *natura*. In this first stage we will come across Eriugena's interpretation of the fall of man in paradise, the analysis of which may help us see where in the *Periphyseon*'s dialectical development the movement of man's procession shifts into that of his return. Having described how Eriugena envisages the return of man, I want to end this first stage by drawing specific inferences regarding the general bearing of man's development on *natura*'s restoration at large.

Let me first of all outline Eriugena's general reading of the sixth day of creation as recorded in Gen. 1:24-26. Genesis' description of this sixth day, narrating how the earth brings forth living creatures according to their kinds, starts with the following words: *Producat terra animam viventem in genere suo, iumenta, et reptilia, et bestias terrae secundum species suas* (Gen. 1:24).<sup>17</sup> As the sixth day is primarily remembered as the day on which God created man, it is not in itself surprising that in the *Periphyseon* all elements of the sixth and last day of creation are taken to refer in one way or another to man. In the quoted opening phrase of the sixth day Genesis introduces the living beings that are brought forth from the earth. Eriugena finds that Genesis thereby points to man's place among the genus of the living animals, the term 'earth' indicating the repository of the primordial causes through which man received his actual being. Note that Eriugena understands the *animam* (soul) in Genesis in the wider sense of *animal* (living creatures), so as specifically to cover the human condition which involves a body alongside the soul.<sup>18</sup> Despite a clear position as one of the animals, man is yet found to be singled out among them, for he is the only animal that is created in the image and likeness of God.<sup>19</sup> Through this special divine likeness he becomes appointed the head of creation.<sup>20</sup> This is recorded in Genesis 1:26, where we find God saying explicitly that man should be made in his image and after his likeness to govern all other creatures: *Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram, et praesit piscibus maris, et volatilibus caeli et bestiis, universaeque terrae, omnique reptili, quod movetur in terra*.

If we combine the conclusions drawn from this first reading of Genesis, it appears that Eriugena takes man's creation to be narrated twice. Genesis reveals how man is created among the animals (*Producat terra animam*

<sup>17</sup> The exegesis of this first phrase extends from *Per.* IV 744B to 753C.

<sup>18</sup> See *Per.* IV 746D-747A.

<sup>19</sup> The aspect of man bearing the image of the divine is brought into the discussion in *Per.* IV 750C, after which it is contrasted with man as an animal.

<sup>20</sup> See *Per.* IV 750D-751A.



*viventem*), but it also tells how man is created in the image of God (*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem nostram*). Since Eriugena is following the events of the biblical text closely, the nature of man inevitably becomes a source of confusion. In this first stage of my account of his anthropology I want to concentrate on this major difference between the view of man as a created animal and as the image of God.<sup>21</sup> For the time being most allegorical details of Eriugena's Genesis interpretation will be left aside. The different versions of man's creation proving to be virtually irreconcilable, the Master and his Student are driven into a thorough discussion of all aspects of man. From the ensuing debate it appears that the unity of human nature is the central problem that will have to be agreed upon before we can go on to determine the actual influence of man on the evolution of *natura*.

The first reason the Master gives as to why man's creation is recorded twice highlights the aspect of man's *dignitas rationis et intelligentiae*, which is brought in as a new element in the discussion. According to the Master, it was this most distinctive feature of man that led to his separate introduction as a creature made in the image of God in addition to his already being ranked as an animal:

M. But since that animal form, which is constituted in man, transcends the nature of all other animals that belong in the same genus because of the dignity of reason and intelligence, the prophetic contemplation, by foresight, wanted to link it to the other animals, so as to narrate the creation of man, in accordance with his excellent nature, in broader and more detailed terms at the conclusion of all that had been created by God. Thus the greatest and most precious animal species is commemorated twice in the works of the sixth prophetic contemplation: first, under his own genus, which is animal, man is ordered to proceed from the earth; and somewhat later, after he has been slightly separated from the other animals, he is introduced as created after the image and likeness of God. (*Per.* IV 750B-C)

The Master draws attention to man's rational character in his exegesis of the Genesis text, though we clearly saw above that it was not mentioned there. From this we may infer that he judges it to be essential in assessing man's specific position. Human rationality is thus proclaimed to be the implicit biblical motive for conferring on man a superior status to his fellow animal creatures, expressed in the exclusive epithet of *imago dei*.<sup>22</sup> Be-

<sup>21</sup> This opposition occurs for the first time at *Per.* IV 750C.

<sup>22</sup> See also *Per.* III 732D, Sh.-W.: 284, where reason and intellect are said to comprise the character of the divine image. It is from the Greek tradition, notably Gregory of Nyssa, that Eriugena has derived the view that man's character as divine image pertains in particular to his rational nature, νοῦς, cf. *Per.* IV 790C-D: *Ac per hoc quadam ratione per humanae naturae consequentiam totus homo ad imaginem Dei factus non incongrue dicitur, quamvis proprie et principaliter in solo animo imago subsistere intelligatur....*Cf. the whole passage: *Per.* IV 788A-791A, cf. *De hom. opif.* ch. 11, 12, PG 44, 153C-156B; 161C-164C, Laplace: 121-123; 131-133.

cause of this honourable state of man, Genesis has mentioned his creation twice, both as an animal and as a rational creature. Nevertheless a logical contrast is implied by the two creations. On the one hand, Genesis wants to define man in terms of his rational dignity by calling him the image of God. On the other hand it undeniably presupposes some sort of irrational nature by describing him as an animal. The lurking antithesis between these two views of man deriving from the same Genesis passage governs the debate that now arises between the Master and his Student.<sup>23</sup> As we proceed, I will focus on some of the objections, raised mostly by the Student, which force the Master continually to refine his standpoint on the issue of man.

The first critical question the Student asks is how man, who is admittedly created first of all in the genus of the animals, could have been made in the image of God as well. Genesis seems to imply that man is part of the *genus animalium* and yet transcends it at the same time. In his attempt to explain this the Master argues that, although man has indeed much in common with the animals, such as a body, nutritive life and the use of the senses, he transcends the animals by possessing the powers of reason, soul and intellect. On the question whether or not man should still be seen as an animal on account of his rational capacities, the Student receives a twofold answer. The Master states that man both is and is not an animal being: *Homo animal est; homo animal non est* (*Per.* IV 752C). The animal nature of man appears to be primarily tied up with his body, his nutritive life and the senses. On the higher level of reason, soul and intellect, man would more naturally rank with the celestial essences, since they transcend the animal nature altogether:

...which on account of their excellent nature transcend in a manner above understanding everything that is comprehended in the animal nature. (*Per.* IV 753A)

In man, the animal and the rational aspect are found together in one being, for which reason the Master considers man to have an essentially dual nature. Hence it is understandable that he must in fact have undergone a double creation.

This does not quite settle the matter for the Student, who now finds himself led to believe that man, on account of having a double nature in connection with a double creation, must therefore also possess two souls. The Master vehemently contradicts this opinion, as he wants to dispel all doubts about man's unity of being:

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<sup>23</sup> *Per.* IV 750C-762B.

M. Neither reason nor divine authority grants me to think that there are two souls in the one man; they would indeed forbid it and it is an opinion which cannot be permitted to any true philosopher. Rather, I assert that man is one and the same rational soul conjoined in an inexpressible manner with a human body. Through some miraculous and intelligible division man consists of two parts: in the one, in which he is made after the image and likeness of God, he participates in no animality, but is altogether separated from it, while in the other, where he shares in animality, he belongs to the universal genus of animals, which is brought forth from the earth, i.e. from the common nature of all things. (*Per.* IV 754A-B)

According to the Master, man has only one soul. Though rational by nature, this soul conjoins with the animal body to form one human being, in spite of all attempts to turn man into a random assembly of various parts. The human soul is definitely one and as such it is complete in itself:

For being whole in itself it is everywhere through its wholeness. (*Per.* IV 754B-C)

Notwithstanding this oneness it may yet seem to be plural. For it has different functions, in relation to which it goes by different names, depending on whether it is seen as rational or sensual or vegetative etc... Eriugena briefly enumerates the soul's different motions, the first three of which were already commented upon in Book II.<sup>24</sup> When contemplating the divine essence, the soul is called *mens* or *animus* or *intellectus*. When dealing with the causes and qualities of created things, it is called *ratio*, and when receiving the species of sensible things through the corporeal senses, it is named *sensus*. To the functions already known the Master now adds the nutritive function of the human soul, i.e. *vitalis motus*. By extending the motions of the soul to include also man's animal life, he sagaciously averts the idea of two human souls.

Not entirely satisfied, however, the Student awaits yet further clarification on the problem of how man can be both spiritual and non-spiritual, animal and non-animal all at the same time. The Master explains that man not only combines these seemingly contrasting aspects, but in fact contains the whole of creation within himself.<sup>25</sup> Although it is generally held that created nature is subjected to a fivefold division, since it can be either *corporea*, *vitalis*, *sensitiva*, *rationalis* or *intellectualis* (*Per.* IV 755B), in a unique manner human nature contains all these aspects in one being, sharing the first three with the animals and the last two with the celestial

<sup>24</sup> See *Per.* II 572C-573B, Sh.-W.: 106-108. See also above ch. 2.2.

<sup>25</sup> Eriugena points out that not only are all things understood in man, but they also appear to exist in him, cf. *Per.* IV 755B with *Per.* IV 760A: *Humana siquidem natura in universitate totius conditae naturae tota est, quoniam in ipsa omnis creatura constituta est, et in ipsa copulata est, et in ipsum reversura, et per ipsum salvanda.*

essences. However, man's animal and his spiritual side are by no means mingled. In his capacity as animal, man is completely devoid of rational powers, whereas as a spiritual being, he completely lacks all animal aspects.<sup>26</sup>

A more complicated problem arises when the Student turns out still not to be convinced of the intrinsic unity of human nature. If it is indeed true that man falls under the genus of animals, and it is also true that all species are one in their genus,<sup>27</sup> how can it be that man is the only animal that is rational, while all other animals are irrational? The contrast between the predicates 'rational' and 'irrational' applied to the same underlying human being, triggers the Student to attack what he sees as a logical anomaly. The Master rebuts that charge. According to him what we are dealing with here is not so much a controversy of mutually exclusive predications, which could occur only among samples of the same species, but rather a difference between various species, which belong all to the same genus. While it would definitely be improper to apply contradictory statements to the same subject, e.g. when we say that man is a rational and an irrational animal at the same time, it is perfectly logical to sustain that man is a rational animal, even though all other animals are irrational. The difference between this animal and others, such as horses, lies in the fact that man, by nature, has a rational disposition, which sets him apart from the animal sort generally marked by the absence of reason.<sup>28</sup>

Defeated on this logical issue, the Student resumes his attack by returning to one of the Master's earlier claims, namely that man both is and is not an animal. If the Master finds that one cannot hold two contradictory claims over the same subject, how then does he justify that man is and is not an animal? This time there is no logical loophole left for the Master to evade the Student's objection. He must confront the difference between man's animal nature on the one hand and his remarkable character of divine image on the other. Since the Master cannot successfully define man without using contradictory claims, he embarks on an altogether new course by locating these contradictions at the very heart of man's unity. For this purpose he resorts to the unchallenged method of the *via negativa*. Previously this method was applied only to God, but since man is created in the image of God, the Master proposes that the system of negative and affirmative theology holds equally true for man, as the being closest to

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<sup>26</sup> *Per. IV 755B-C: ...in quantum communicat animalibus, merito animal est....in quantum vero divinae caelestisque essentiae particeps est,....non est animal.*

<sup>27</sup> For a critical evaluation of Eriugena's use of logic, particularly the *Categoriae Decem*, see Marenbon 1980.

<sup>28</sup> *Per. IV 756B-757B.*

God. As God can be called truth, but is never to be identified with it, so in the same manner we can describe man as an animal, though we must disavow the total accuracy of this description at the same time. Just as it is more appropriate to use negative predications to describe God's dignity, since they are closer to the truth than affirmative statements with just metaphorical meaning, so with the same weight of argument, the negative '*homo animal non est*' can be said to characterize man more adequately than its positive variant. Besides, it was God himself who stipulated that human nature should be created in his own image, thus endowing him with near-divine qualities.<sup>29</sup>

The motives for Eriugena's preference for negative over positive statements in the description of man as well as God are essentially similar. They all point to a feat of transcendence. Just as God is the omnipotent cause of the whole of *natura* and thereby the immanent reason for its existence, so man is considered to be the ultimate reason for the existence of the created universe, over which he is to reign supreme:

M. Should it surprise us then, if it can be truly and simultaneously predicated of man, who alone among all other creatures is made in God's image, that 'man is an animal', and 'man is not an animal'? We may thus understand at once that this animal about whom statements which are contradictory in other living beings can be truly and simultaneously predicated is specially created in God's image. Moreover, if affirmations and negations coincide for the divine essence, because it transcends all things that are made by it and of which it is the cause, for whom would it not be appropriate to conclude that negations and affirmations unanimously coincide as to its image and likeness, which is located in man, especially since he stands above all other animals, of whose same genus he is created, and which are created because of him? Who of the true philosophers would ignore that this visible world with all its parts, from the highest to the lowest, was created because of man, so that he might preside over it and have power over all visible things? (*Per.* IV 758A-B)

One last question regarding Genesis' twofold description of man concerns the integration of these aspects into a being of unbroken unity, a creature that is whole in itself. Can man be an animal in the part in which he is God's image and vice versa?<sup>30</sup> It is once again by comparison with God, whose presence in *natura* is both transcendent and immanent at the same time, that the Master explains man's prominent position in creation. We find him making a statement that depicts the role of man *vis-à-vis* creation in very similar terms; man is an integrated part of this world and

<sup>29</sup> *Per.* IV 757C-758B.

<sup>30</sup> It is presupposed, however, that this question does not involve a confusion of man's animal and his divine parts. This possibility has been excluded in *Per.* IV 755B-C.

yet stands apart from it. In the end the parallels between man and God grow so close, that man is seen in fact to reach beyond himself:

M. God is both above and in all things, since he himself is the essence of all things, who alone truly is, and although he is whole in all things, he does not stop being whole outside them, whole in the world, whole around the world, whole in the sensible creature, whole in the intelligible creature, whole creating the universe, whole being created in the universe, whole in the whole of the universe, whole in its parts, because he himself is the whole as well as the part, and he is neither the whole nor the part. In the same way human nature, in its own world, its own universe, its visible and invisible parts, is whole in itself, and in its wholeness it is whole, and in its parts it is whole, and its parts are whole in themselves, and whole in the whole. For even its lowest and vilest part, I mean the body, is according to its reasons whole in the whole man, because the body, in so far as it truly is body, subsists in its own reasons which are made in the first stage of creation, and since it -i.e. human nature- is so in itself, it is more than its own wholeness. (*Per.* IV 759A-B)

The Master knits man and God almost indissolubly together, saying not only that man is complete in his own world or universe, but also that he occupies essentially the same position in the totality of created nature, whether visible or invisible: *in universo mundo visibili et invisibili* (*Per.* IV 760A). To the Student's original question regarding man's unity the Master answers that man is complete everywhere in himself. Thus he concludes his speculations on human nature by announcing its complete integrated unity, even in view of its two most contrasting qualities:

...that it [i.e. human nature] is everywhere whole in itself, that is to say: both the [divine] image whole in the animal and the animal whole in the image. (*Per.* IV 761B)

However, there is one fundamental question regarding man which the Student still wants to be solved. It deals with the problem of man's animal nature and its links to sin.<sup>31</sup> The Student asks whether man was an animal even before he committed sin. The problem emerging here seems to originate in Ps. 48:13 (Vulg.) where man is explicitly portrayed as being turned into a senseless beast on account of losing the distinguishing feature of his rational dignity: *Homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit, comparatus est jumentis insipientibus et similis factus est illis*. However, in answering his Student the Master draws a fundamental dividing-line between the *jumenta* as the genus of animals with which man is ranked in Genesis, and the *jumenta insipientia* (senseless beasts), with which he is compared in this Psalm. According to Genesis man undoubtedly was an animal -albeit a rational one- from the very beginning, regardless of the consequences of

<sup>31</sup> *Per.* IV 761B-762B.

sin. Sin merely occurred when man's rational nature surrendered to irrational passions, for which it received proper punishment. Therefore, there are no compelling grounds whatsoever to associate the animal state in which man was originally created with the problem of sin. In *Per.* IV 763A we find the Master's strongest statement on this issue, as he severs all ties between sin and human animal nature, claiming apodeictically:

Not sin but nature has made an animal of man.

This sums up all aspects of man's creation as found in the Genesis description in 1:24-26. Eriugena is obviously interested in presenting man as a perfect creature with a unified nature, despite the latent discrepancy between his rational and his animal side. Man is the last creature to come into being. He completes the sequence of divine acts spread out over a period of six days. Man is created among the animals, being equal to them but superior at the same time, since he is the only animal to be created in the image and likeness of God. He is therefore selected to govern creation, serving more or less as the divine viceroy on earth.<sup>32</sup> In contemplating Eriugena's view of man we have seen how he drew the elements of Genesis together for a portrayal of man as the last and culminating point of God's creativity in the six days of creation. Transferred to the level of *natura*, where creation reflects the third species of nature, Eriugena's view of man as the last creature to come into existence corresponds with his being the last effect that was created into *natura creata et non creans*. With man the *Periphyseon*'s movement of *processio* seems to have reached its conclusion.

### *B. Man and the Return of Nature*

The most important association evoked by the figure of man in the *Periphyseon* is the theme of nature's return. As we have said before, in Genesis human nature represents the apex of creation. Man is created in the genus of the animals, but his most characteristic feature is undoubtedly his character as *imago dei*, manifest in the dignity conveyed through reason and intelligence. Convinced of the unity of human nature, Eriugena proposes the full integration of man's animal and rational aspects, of his body and his soul. Only when complete in himself, is man able to fulfill his responsible task as God's representative on earth and lead creation back to God.

Man's position is the most Godlike of all created beings. Eriugena

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<sup>32</sup> On the notion of human beings as God's rational viceroys on earth in Eastern Christianity, see Thunberg 1985: 298-303.

quotes Augustine to illustrate the close relationship between God and man, which seems to make man even more important than the angels, though the latter claim to have immediate insight:

M. For it [i.e. human nature] could not in any other way cling to its creator without going beyond all things under it and beyond itself, because as Augustine says: 'between our mind, with which we understand the Father, and the truth, through which we understand him, no creature is interposed.' (Per. IV 759B-C) (*De ver. rel.* LV, 113)

As the instance of creation closest to the truth the human mind functions as the instrument through which we can truly understand the Father. If man, who is found at the end of the movement of *processio*, should start the movement of return, the return will obviously have to depend on his rational dignity and lead the mind by comprehending the truth to the Father. Since God transcends man, man in order to be reunited with God will ultimately have to reach beyond this rational dignity, which is forever bound by human limitations. We have already seen that man is able to exceed the limitations of his own nature, for which the nature of man's rationality was implicitly responsible. In fact, when we take full account of negative theology, man can only return to God as an *inscius*, i.e. with the complete abandonment of his senses and his intellectual operations. Eriugena gives us a foretaste of what the final attainment of God must be like, when he quotes from Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystica Theologia*:

O friend Timothy, now that your journey has been strengthened by moving among the mystical speculations, leave the senses behind, and the intellectual activities, and the sensible and invisible things, and everything that is and that is not, and as far as possible, return unknowingly to the unity of him who is above all essence and knowledge; by this immeasurable and absolute mental ecstasy, you will ascend from yourself and other things, abandoning all things and cut loose from them, to the superessential ray of the divine darkness. (Per. IV 759C) (*Myst. Theol.* §1, PG 3, 997B-999A)

But this is not the mystical road Eriugena has in mind for man in the *Periphyseon*. At least not yet. The reason for this is that man, before he could start making use of his rational powers (even if only to sacrifice them), fell prey to the corrupting influence of sin. In the context of Genesis, Eriugena has to face the fact that the perfection of paradise did not last, since sin disturbed man's state of eternal happiness, and he was expelled from paradise. However, in Eriugena's interpretation of human nature sin has in fact a far more radical impact: by damaging his rational as well as his animal character it dissolves the constitutive unity of man. The corruptive influence of sin pollutes man's animality. In consequence of sin man becomes endowed with a physical body, for which he previously had no use. But, what is more important, sin obscures man's character



as *imago dei*, for it overturns the supremacy of reason over the irrational passions. Thus it poses an immediate and severe threat to human dignity, since man can no longer be distinguished from the irrational animals. Therefore, before focusing on how man will eventually restore *natura* to its former state of unity, we have to evaluate how Eriugena remedies the effects of sin on the earlier defined dignity of human nature.

If we now follow Eriugena's arguments on the issue of sin and how it affects human nature, we see that on the whole Eriugena adopts the viewpoints of Gregory of Nyssa, whose *De imagine* he quotes extensively on this matter.<sup>33</sup> To evaluate his position on the issue of human sin, I will therefore try to give an adequate summary of how Eriugena reads and interprets Gregory. After this I shall turn to his interpretation of the specific role of man with regard to nature's pending *reditus*.

The discussion of man's unity, which was discontinued by the Student and his Master in ch.7 (*Per.* IV 762B), is taken up again in ch.11 (*Per.* IV 786C), and in the process it can be seen gradually to shift to the focal point of man's *imago*-character. We find the Master arguing that man, though ultimately one, is composed of different parts, i.e. a body and a soul. In connection with this he raises the question whether man is found to bear the divine image in all these parts or only in the higher ones. The Student answers that man's body is unanimously held not to be created in the image of God. Only the soul is, that is in all its aspects, which include in addition to intellect, reason and the interior sense, also the exterior sense and the body's vital motion. The Student is at last convinced that the soul is in itself undivided and one, although its motions are indeed numerous. Continuing the discussion, the Student explains how the soul is said to be created in God's image in two ways. Firstly, just as God permeates everything but can never be encompassed, so the soul or mind penetrates the body, but is not to be contained by it. Secondly, just as God can be understood to be, but cannot be known as to what he is, similarly one can understand the human soul to be without actual knowledge of what it is.

It is at this point that the Student starts quoting from Gregory's *De imagine*, in an attempt further to clarify the notion of *imago*. From Gregory he takes the view that man naturally consists of three parts, which are the mind or soul (*animus*), vital motion (*vitalis motus*) and formed matter (*materia formata*). The mind is God's image, which means that it reflects the highest good like a mirror; the vital motion is the image of the soul, for

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Gregory's *De hominis opificio*, PG 44, 123-256. See also Cappuyns' edition of Eriugena's integral translation of this work of Gregory's, RThAM 32 (1965) 205-262. In the *Periphyseon* Eriugena quotes up to 25% of the *De hom. opif.* There is no evidence that Eriugena was familiar with any of Gregory's other works. For a comparison between the anthropology of Eriugena and Gregory of Nyssa, see Naldini 1979. See also Dales 1977: 560-565. For Gregory's anthropology, see Leys 1951; De Boer 1968.

in its turn it reflects the divine reflection that was transmitted to the soul, thus linking the soul to the body. In this concatenated, hierarchical structure it is in fact only the soul which is truly created in God's image, yet this does not break up man's unity. For the vital motion receives the reflected image from the soul, and subsequently impresses it on matter. The Student summarizes Gregory as follows:

S. And so, for some reason resulting from human nature, the whole man is rightly said to be made in the image of God, although properly and primarily this image is understood to subsist in the mind only. And the following order applies: the mind takes the cause of its formation from God, with no other creature interposed, but the vital motion takes it from the mind, and finally matter takes it from the mind through the vital motion. Thus matter follows the vital motion, and vital motion follows the mind, while the mind follows God himself. When turned to God the mind guards the integrity and beauty of its own nature, but when it turns away from him, it destroys and deforms not only itself but also that which is subject to it, that is, material life and matter itself. (*Per.* IV 790C-791A)

Pursuing his investigation of Gregory, the Student stresses among other things that we should not think the soul to be confined to a particular part of the body. This leads him to tackle the burning question of what it is that ultimately determines man's character as divine image. According to Gregory the meaning of *imago* is fundamentally that it mediates between the divine mind, which forms its principal model, and the mind that is created after it. It is the true nature of every image to resemble its model, so that an image stops being an image as soon as it deviates from it. As to the specific meaning of man's character of *imago dei*, Gregory holds the following. God wanted man primarily to be created as good. Since it would be impossible to endow man with the wide variety of all individual goods, he decided to make him in his own image, so that he was near divine goodness in all aspects. Man resembles God precisely in embracing the plenitude of all good things. Like God man also possesses perfect freedom, which discloses a complete lack of necessity in realizing his desires.<sup>34</sup>

With all these similarities there is one fundamental difference between man and God left, namely that the one is created whereas the other is not:

What difference between God himself and the one who is like him will there be for us to contemplate? This, that the one is not created, while the other subsists through creation. (*Per.* IV 796B)<sup>35</sup>

God is uncreated and thereby immutable; being created man is mutable

<sup>34</sup> On man as the image of God in Gregory, see De Boer 1968: 148-186.

<sup>35</sup> See Gregory of Nyssa, *De hom. opif.*, PG 44, 184C, Laplace: 157.

and must therefore still prove his ultimate stability. With regard to this stability it is here that things first go wrong. This is the first indication of why Eriugena has chosen not to follow the path set out by Pseudo-Dionysius. However near to perfection God may have intended man to be, since he had created him in his image he had also endowed him with a free will, which clearly furnishes him with his own responsibility. About man's virtuous, i.e. Godlike, nature Gregory says:

Virtue is a voluntary thing, which is free from domination. (*Per.* IV 796B)

In committing sin, however, man misuses his free will by choosing to disobey God. Thus he abuses his *imago*-character. In view of these events, his expulsion from paradise seems only a fitting consequence.

However, Gregory's interpretation of sin is slightly different. He states that God had foreseen from the very beginning that man would turn away from him, and that for this reason he had taken measures in advance. Gregory also holds that God's major concern was not how to punish man, but rather how to save him. Through the misdirection of his free will, man, who as a spiritual creature was designed to procreate like the angels until the fullness of mankind was reached, forfeited his spiritual manner of propagation. To let the complete number of men still come into being, i.e. to counteract upon the damaging effect of sin, God 'superadded' to man's spiritual body (in which his rational soul marked his *imago*-character) a physical body, in which the sexual differences between man and woman are disclosed. In the *Periphyseon*, as in Gregory, it is not man's punishment of expulsion from paradise, but rather the superadding of a physical body that marks the true and lasting effect of sin.

For Gregory this ultimately explains why we find Scripture mentioning two narratives of man's creation, i.e. in Gen. 1:26 and 2:7, which might give one the impression that Genesis is repeating itself. Gregory detects a great difference between these two stories. The first creation deals with man created in the image of God, -man standing here for the whole of mankind, as a mere idea in the mind of God-, whereas the second creation refers to man after he has gone astray, as he finds himself in a miserable state of physical procreation. According to Gregory the first story of man's creation is definitely more important, since it portrays him closer to God. It is to this state of *imago dei* also that man will eventually have to return.<sup>36</sup>

After the Student's lengthy quotations, the Master summarizes Gregory:

<sup>36</sup> *Per.* IV 793C-799A. See Gregory, *De hom. opif.*, PG 44, 177D-192A, Laplace: 151-166.

M. The words of the aforementioned great theologian introduced by you seem no less than that we should understand man to be created in the image of God only in his mind and the virtues that are naturally implanted in it - in the mind are wisdom, knowledge, the power of reason, and the other virtues, with which the soul is adorned, thereby expressing in itself man's likeness to his creator - and that all men were made together simultaneously in that one man, about whom it is written: 'Let us make man in our image and likeness' [Gen. 1:26], and 'In whom all men sinned' [Rom. 5:12]; for at that time that one man represented every one, and in him all men became expelled from the happiness of paradise. And if man had not sinned, he would not have suffered the division of his simplicity into a double sex. That division does not belong to the image and likeness of the divine nature, and it would by no means have existed, had man not sinned, nor will it exist after the restoration of his nature to its pristine state, which will be made manifest after the general resurrection of all men. And, therefore, had man not sinned, no one would be born through the joining of both sexes or from seed,.... But because God, who neither deceives nor is deceived, foresaw that man would abandon the order and dignity of his creation, he contrived for human nature an alternative manner of multiplication, by which this world would be extended through space and time, so that men would pay their general debt for their general crime, by being born from corruptible seed, just like the other animals. (*Per.* IV 799A-C)

From this passage it emerges that Eriugena, following Gregory, ultimately thinks of man's physical existence as an existence deeply tainted by original sin, whose most distinctive mark turns out to be the division into sexes and the animal manner of procreation.

In the context of the *Periphyseon*'s larger structure, however, Gregory's account leaves a number of problems unsolved. The first question the discussion partners now face concerns the state in which man was originally created. If man was indeed equipped with a corruptible body only on account of sin, does that imply that he was entirely without body before the act of sin (i.e. when he was still in the undefiled state of *imago dei*)? It is at any rate clear that, if there was a human body before sin, it cannot have been the same after sin. The Master therefore concludes that there was indeed a body before sin, but that it was spiritual and immortal. To this body man will return after his resurrection, since according to Gregory it remains uncorrupted even after sin. The Master then needs to decide how this first body can be recognized at all once the second body is 'super-added' to it because of sin. Turning again to Gregory for a solution, he finds that man's spiritual body is defined as the common bodily form shared by all human beings. It underlies the material bodies that are subsequently added and therefore subject to accidental differences. The connection between the two bodies is indicated by Gregory when he describes

the material, external body as a *vestimentum* (vestment) or a *signaculum* (signet) of the internal one.<sup>37</sup>

A second problem regards the final fate of the superadded body, which, though created on account of sin, still originates in God himself. Thus it cannot be simply annihilated, not even with death. The Master, drawing once again on Gregory, implies that after death man's material body will dissolve, but not perish. The form (εἶδος, *species*) of this body will remain in the soul as the idea inscribed on a signet. As Gregory has it: *Necessario specie veluti descripti signaculi formae in anima permanente...* (*Per.* IV 802C)<sup>38</sup> The form of the physical body remains forever in the soul, so that the soul may recognize the scattered elements after its dissolution through death and reassemble these in order to reconstruct the interior body. The external body is ultimately only the signet of the internal body. In effect, there never really were two bodies, as they ultimately converge into one. The superadded body is the clothing of the spiritual body, rather than a true body itself.

Departing from the idea of a spiritual body before sin, on which there is a general agreement with Gregory, the Student then confronts his Master with the opinion of Augustine,<sup>39</sup> who seems to hold that man had an animal, material body even before he committed sin. This animal body of man in paradise was by no means immortal, but since there was no sin it would not need to die. Leading a life without sin, man would at the end of his life receive an immortal and incorruptible body. Although the Master does not want to contradict Augustine on this, he clearly disagrees with him. Yet he takes care to steer a middle course, saying that, although Augustine may rightly claim that man had an animal body in paradise, he glorifies human life in paradise to such an extent, that the possession of an animal body would seem quite inappropriate and disconcerting in view of his own statements.

Though he avoids making a clear decision on this issue, it is evident that the Master spurns Augustine's view as being ultimately inconsistent. The Student, on the other hand, wants to defend it, claiming that they themselves had after all upheld that man was created *in genere animalium*. Though the Master admits to this, his interpretation is far different from Augustine's,<sup>40</sup> as it has undergone substantial change through the reading of Gregory. The Master defines his own position by saying that man was created in the genus of animals on account of God's foreknowledge of

<sup>37</sup> *Per.* IV 800B-803A.

<sup>38</sup> See *De hom. opif.*, PG 44, 228B, Laplace: 212-213.

<sup>39</sup> *Per.* IV 803B ff. See Augustine, *De peccat. merit.*, I 2, 2-3.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Augustine, *De civ. dei*, XIV 10; XIV 26.

human sin, by which he became affected even before he deserved to lead an animal life because of it. It thus appears that God had created the consequences of sin in and with man, even before sin itself happened. In this view of man the order of events in Genesis is completely overthrown. Contrary to appearances, this does not create a situation of utter confusion between man's state before and after sin. The Master makes it clear that one must be careful always to discriminate between man's *imago*-character (i.e. his mind, his reason and his interior sense) and that which can be regarded as the outcome of sin: the animal body, the male and the female sex, the bestial way of procreation, man's need for food, for drink and clothing, the growing of the body, the alternation of sleeping and waking etc.<sup>41</sup>

To the natural question as to why the consequences of sin precede actual sin the Master answers that the temporal order in which Genesis narrates the events leading to man's downfall, is intended merely to facilitate our understanding rather than describe the divine truth. Starting from the premise that for God all things happen simultaneously, he argues:

M. Why then would he [i.e. God] not make at once the things which he simultaneously saw were to be made and wanted to be made? For when we say 'before' and 'after sin', we indicate the instability of our reflections, due to the fact that we are still subjected to a temporal order: but to God the foreknowledge of sin and its consequences are simultaneous. Thus for man, but not for God, sin lay ahead, and the consequences of sin preceded the actual deed of sin in man, because the actual deed of sin also preceded itself in the same man. It is definitely true that the evil will, which is hidden sin, preceded the tasting of the forbidden fruit, which is manifest sin. (*Per.* IV 808A-B)

This passage appears to be quite revealing, as it claims the inversion of the temporal order of events in Genesis. Its effect culminates in an even more unexpected ending. Since for God there is no separation of past and future on the basis of which one can discriminate between the divine foreknowledge of sin and the coming into effect of its actual effects, there is also no temporal distinction to be assumed between man's intention to go wrong and his actual commission of the crime.<sup>42</sup> Thus even on the very issue of sin, God and man are quite alike. They are both not confined by time.

The confusing contemporaneity of God's foreknowledge of sin and his creation of its actual consequences on the one hand, and of man's inclina-

<sup>41</sup> *Per.* IV 807A-D.

<sup>42</sup> It is the disappearance of a visible criterion within human nature to distinguish right from wrong that forms the transition from this first anthropological level to the second, as it seems to initiate a greater freedom of exegetical interpretation on Eriugena's part.

tion to sin and his actual deed of sin on the other, leads to the complete effacement of any assumed chronological order of events in paradise. This in turn implies that man was in fact never to be found entirely without sin, the source of which is located in his own mutable will, which gives rise to unjustified pride. The Master embroiders on this topic, quoting from Augustine who in his *Hexaemeron* denies that man spent any actual time in paradise. This provokes a most radical view of chronology. The story of paradise becomes deferred altogether to the future rather than reflecting some bygone past:

M. Therefore in my opinion it seems more logical that the praise of the life of man in paradise must refer to the life that would have been his future, if he had remained obedient, than to a completion of his actual life, in which he had just started, but would not be able to continue. (*Per.* IV 809B)<sup>43</sup>

The Master supports his view by saying that Augustine often states in the past tense things which refer to a future that could have been, just as divine authority itself (that is Scripture) does. He extends the interpretation of paradise as a lost future to include even the role of the devil. The gospel of John (8:44) has it that the devil was a murderer from the beginning, thus intimating that he cannot have spent any time in paradise. In Augustine's interpretation, the devil, instead of being created *malus*, was also created with a free will which he chose to misuse.<sup>44</sup> Thus the 'mystical permutation of times' with respect to the events in Genesis holds true for man as well as for the devil. It suggests that man did not spend time in paradise and therefore did not at all eat from the tree of life, since this would have absolutely prevented his committing sin. However, this in no way makes the devil responsible for man's sin. The Master holds that the devil is not immediately guilty, as man fell within himself, before he was seduced by the devil.<sup>45</sup>

This statement about the devil reiterates the earlier claim that man's inclination to sin precedes actual sin. Thus it brings the Master back to the problem of God's foreknowledge of human sin, which made him divide man into male and female, replacing the angelic manner of procreation with a physical one. Through alternate quotations from Gregory of Nyssa

<sup>43</sup> A similar deferral of the realization of paradise is found at the beginning of Book V, 859D-862A.

<sup>44</sup> In opposition to Stock 1967: 34-35, who advocates the view that the devil was created with his pride. Stock's misinterpretation may have arisen from a misprint in PL 122, 810A, where it reads *Neque enim cecidit, sed talis est factus*, as opposed to Augustine's text, supported by the manuscript tradition of Book IV, which has: *Neque enim cecidit, si talis est factus* (*De Gen. ad litt.*, XI, 23-30).

<sup>45</sup> *Per.* IV 811C: *Ubi datur intelligi, quod homo prius in se ipso lapsus est, quam diabolo tentaretur.*

and Maximus the Confessor, the discussion of this matter draws to a close. Gregory finds that God, in a foreseeing operation, had created man in much the same way as he created the angels, in the sense that man was created in the eternal causes first. Since man immediately deviated from the truth and thereby lost his dignity, God, in order not to diminish the final number of men, gave them an alternative way of multiplication, by which they could effectively come into being. Maximus essentially holds the same view, when he states that man has preferred a life according to the senses to a life in the image of God, and is therefore to receive a material birth, from which, he adds, only Christ can release him. Maximus also supports the suggestion that man may not have eaten from the tree of life, since this would have preserved his share in divine immortality.<sup>46</sup>

For the time being this concludes the discussion on human nature. The Student and his Master go on to concentrate on the nature of paradise. This first part of Eriugena's anthropology typically ends with a diplomatic note, as the Master makes it clear that, though he wants to follow the opinions of Gregory and Maximus who do not believe that man spent any actual time in paradise, he does not intend to impose his opinion at the expense of other views. But however carefully he may want to proceed, it is at any rate clear that he will follow a *via ratiocinandi*, which will inevitably put him at odds with certain authoritative, but as it happens often inconsistent, views.

### C. Summary

Having focused at length on Eriugena's discussion of human nature in the context of Genesis, I wish to draw some conclusions regarding man's procession and return in the universe, in order to see how this biblical account affects man's role in the process of nature's overall return. We have seen that in Genesis man was the last creature to be created in the universe and the only created effect endowed with the honorary title of *imago dei*.<sup>47</sup> Man has a body, created as he is *in genere animalium*, but this body was originally a spiritual one. However, it seems that the creation of man relates to an ideal coming into being which never really took place. Eriugena presents a fairly different interpretation of man's actual coming into being as an effect in the spatio-temporal world. From the very beginning he seems to incorporate the harmful effects of human sin.

Following Gregory of Nyssa, he states that God envisaged by his fore-

<sup>46</sup> *Per.* IV 813B-D. Cf. Maximus, *Ambig.*, PG 91, 1156D-1157A.

<sup>47</sup> For an overview of the tradition of the human person as the image of God, see Thunberg 1985 (Eastern Christianity) and McGinn 1985b (Western Christianity).



knowledge that man would be incapable of executing his task as true *imago* (i.e. transmitting the divine goodness to creation by way of an immediate, mirroring reflection) and that he would turn his free will away from God to the material world of the senses. Man would thus run the risk of forfeiting his angelic mode of propagation, thereby seriously endangering the forthcoming lives of a predetermined number of human souls. To salvage humankind, God anticipated sin by dividing man into two sexes, the male and the female, superadding a physical body to the spiritual one. Thus man could multiply himself in a bestial way. It is in this manner that man actually came into being as a species belonging to *natura non creans et creata*, i.e. as a divided, and thus defiled, being. Notwithstanding Book's IV initial attempt to discern the dual nature of man as a unique characteristic, we can in fact not reconstruct human nature as it may have been before sin. God created all things at once (*omnia simul*),<sup>48</sup> including the consequences of sin. The temporal order in which Genesis narrates the events appears to be only for educational purposes, for man had sinned as soon as he came into being in the image of God. Thereby he immediately sacrificed his human dignity, surrendering himself to irrational passions and lowering his spiritual body to receive a material one.

With regard to the final *reditus* of nature, man's defiled state poses a number of problems. First of all, because it is clear that man has traded the intended unity of human existence for a divided state of being only on account of sin, he desperately needs to be restored to this previous unity. As man's unity is theoretically conceived of as the full integration of the soul with the body, the return of man seems to involve more than re-establishing his physically undivided state before sin, or as Eriugena has it elsewhere: *homo melior est quam sexus*.<sup>49</sup> With the restoration of man's undivided state, Eriugena also intends to restore man to his spiritual body. Most importantly, however, because it affects and unites all aspects of human existence, he wants to return man to his previous dignity. As has been explained above, this dignity was located particularly in the control of man's rational faculty over his vital motion and his sensory activity. At the end of this first section of Eriugena's anthropology, as he quotes from Maximus the Confessor's *Ambigua*, we find the answer to the problem of man's lost dignity solved by the Incarnation of Christ, to which Maximus refers in the following manner:

And with the intention of liberating man from this [i.e. the ignoble manner of procreation which he had received on account of sin], and of leading him back to a state of divine happiness, the Word that created human nature

<sup>48</sup> Ecclus. 18:1, *Qui vivit in aeternum creavit omnia simul*.

<sup>49</sup> *Per.* II 534A, Sh.-W.: 24.

truly becomes man in the middle of mankind, and is born from man in the flesh without sin. (*Per.* IV 813A)<sup>50</sup>

It is through divine intervention alone, i.e. Christ's grace, that man can indeed be liberated from his sinful state. By entering into a physical state entirely without sin, Christ proves an effective remedy against the corrupting influences of sin, rehabilitating the body of man. Yet it is not only through his Incarnation that Christ restores man to his original being. His Resurrection also counteracts the problems caused by human sin by wiping out its most disastrous consequence - human death. The Resurrection of Christ, as well as foreshadowing the resurrection of mankind at the end of times, serves actually to annihilate the consequences of sin, as it saves the body of man, restoring it in Eriugena's view to its original spiritual state. Christ is seen as the forerunner of man made perfect, who can execute the supervision of the return of creation to God. In this respect Christ's role in the *Periphyseon* takes on remarkable cosmological dimensions, for it is ultimately through Christ that *natura* is saved in its entirety.<sup>51</sup> It is not surprising then that most of Eriugena's Christology is found in Book V, which deals with the return of all things to God even more explicitly.<sup>52</sup>

But on the level of Eriugena's anthropology the process of man's return reveals yet another characteristic trait. We have already indicated Christ's redeeming role through his Incarnation, whereby man's original undivided and sinless state was restored. This is a biblical line of thought, to which Eriugena alludes from time to time, but which seems not to be of major concern in the *Periphyseon*. The same holds true for the Resurrection of Christ, which solves the problem of human death. Notwithstanding Eriugena's eschatological references, his arguments seem in point of fact to advocate quite a different solution. In Eriugena's view it was on account of sin, anticipated in God's foreknowledge, that man became divided into male and female and that his spiritual body was clothed with a physical one. However, this physical body, which reflects the division of mankind, is declared to be only superadded. It is yet to be seen what this notion entails. The implications of man's body being only 'superadded' appear to be essentially twofold.

Firstly, by assuming a superadded body Eriugena applies a less radical action than a straightforward transformation from man's spiritual into his material state would have accounted for. Thus he can make it quite clear

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Eriugena's Latin translation: *Ambig. ad Ioh.* VI 3, 642-645. See also Maximus: *Ambig.* PG 91, 1348A-B.

<sup>51</sup> See Cappuyns 1933: 361-370. See also Stock 1967: 9-12 and Colish 1982.

<sup>52</sup> See *Per.* V 892C-907B *passim*, chs. 20 to 23.

that it is by his own free will that man sins, but this does not mean that God condemns human nature completely. He merely 'adds' something to the human state.

Secondly, by adding something to the human state God seems to leave what is lying underneath unaffected. The effect of this is that man's crime can be punished in this superadded body, while after undergoing this punishment man can be cleansed from the effects of sin by the simple removal of the physical body.<sup>53</sup> This happens at death, when the body will dissolve into its elements. It will then await the resurrection of mankind at the end of times, foreboded in the Resurrection of Christ, when the soul will reassemble the elements into the spiritual body as it was originally intended.

Eriugena's solution to the problem of sin by means of a superadded body may be seen to reflect the degree to which he takes sin seriously. The extreme consequences of his view are still latent, but on close inspection their contours are gradually becoming visible. To give but a faint indication. If the physical body is only superadded to man's spiritual body, with which his *imago*-character was fully integrated, how far has man's dignity been seriously undermined by sin? Though nowhere denying human responsibility for the occurrence of sin, Eriugena seems clearly inclined to minimize the radical impact of sin. This impression is rather confirmed, when he says:

M. But the rational and intellectual nature, although not wishing to be misled, could still be deceived, especially since it had not yet received the perfection of its created state which it was awaiting as a reward for its obedience, through its transformation in *theosis* -I mean deification. Thus we ought not to judge human nature on the basis of how it appears to the bodily senses. For, condemned on account of its transgression to the likeness of irrational animals, it is born through the copulation of the sexes in this world, whose end is death, in a temporal and corruptible manner. Rather, we ought to judge human nature on the basis of its creation in the image of God, before it committed sin. (*Per.* IV 760D-761A)

Man did not sin intentionally at all; his only fault was that he allowed himself to be deceived, i.e. by the serpent in paradise. Although we have seen that Eriugena modifies this statement later on in Book IV by saying that man fell because of his own pride before he was deceived, he apparently finds that man ought to be exonerated to some extent. The reason adduced for this excuse of man is that he had not yet received his state of perfection, his *theosis* or deification. It is at this point that we hit upon Eriugena's ultimate explanation for the occurrence of human sin. The situation in paradise is not something that man has lost, but something he

<sup>53</sup> See the excursion on sin and punishment in Book V, 953A-978B.

is still waiting for. Despite the wretchedness of a physical life of the senses, man has a hidden dignity which remains untouched and lies dormant until the final deification takes place.

Eriugena wants to put paradise altogether in the future instead of idealizing a vague memory of the past. Thus he can follow Maximus' claim that man never ate from the tree of life, which is to be identified with Christ. Thus he can also contradict Augustine, saying that man spent no actual time in paradise. To conclude this first analysis of the *Periphyseon*'s anthropology, I think that for Eriugena man's return to his original state in fact involves a continuing *processio* rather than an actual return, because man has not yet fully realized his character as *imago dei*. To do so, he needs to turn away from the senses and rely on his rational powers. The actual realization of paradise requires divine interference, but in the meantime man has to steer his own rational course, because it is by this token of his dignity that he will finally be judged. In this stage it is still unclear how paradise will eventually take shape. Yet from this first anthropological interpretation we may well have developed doubts as to the possibility of its effective realization in time.

#### 4.2. *Man as Imago Naturae - An Allegorical Approach to Human Nature, Periphyseon IV, chs. 16 to 27*

...*nihil aliud esse paradysum nisi ipsum hominem...*(*Per.* IV 815C).

##### A. *The Position of Man*

The second stage in the interpretation of Eriugena's anthropology will present more problems, as it involves a closer inspection of Eriugena's allegorical exegesis of Genesis.<sup>54</sup> Here, in the context of his allegorical exegesis, Eriugena reveals the ultimate focus of his vision of man. He proposes the complete identification of paradise as described in Genesis with human nature, *humana natura*. This identification is significant, albeit not absolutely original to Eriugena, who claims to be indebted for it to Ambrose and his alleged source, Origen.<sup>55</sup> However this may be, the specific

<sup>54</sup> For an overview of Eriugena's allegorical exegesis of paradise, see Grimm 1977: 111-120.

<sup>55</sup> In his allegorical exegesis, Eriugena makes ample use of Ambrose's *De paradiso*. In *Per.* IV 815C he claims to know that Ambrose follows Origen. It seems that Eriugena had indeed some knowledge of Origen, although the extent of it is not exactly known. In Book V he quotes from the *De principiis* (*Per.* V 929A-930D). According to De Lubac 1961: I,II 225, copies of Origen's works were in the libraries of Laon: 'On sait cependant qu'aux VIIIe et IXe siècle Origène avait sa place dans les bibliothèques de Laon, Beauvais, Reichenau, Saint Mesmin (Orléanais), Saint-Pierre de Chartres.'

anthropological consequences of this identification for the *Periphyseon*'s interpretation of Genesis are enormous, as the wide-ranging story of paradise in Genesis becomes telescoped into the one creature of man. If paradise is the outward manifestation of human nature, all the events taking place in this setting must as a matter of course be reorganized, for they now need to be interpreted within the bounds of human nature. This means that the setting of the events in Genesis changes from a spatio-temporal exterior into a kind of psychological interior, of which he has not yet mapped out the precise structure. In this second stage I shall attempt to evaluate how Eriugena's exegesis, which pivots on the central tenet of paradise as the allegorical image of human nature, influences the *Periphyseon*'s conceptualization of man. This will then lead us to a further analysis of man's role in connection with *natura* in general.

Eriugena's equation of paradise and human nature appears to be brought about by the preceding claim that God created all things in Genesis at the same time (Ecclus. 18:1, *omnia simul*).<sup>56</sup> This conclusion will ultimately result in the idea of the synchronicity of all events in paradise,<sup>57</sup> notably the events of man's creation and his subsequent fall.<sup>58</sup> Eriugena accordingly holds that man, as soon as he was created in the image of God, fell from his dignified position because of his own pride. One sees how Eriugena wants to presents the events in paradise as interconnected on all sides at the expense of their chronological order, yet he tries fully to preserve their literary sequence. In his view the order of Genesis seems to serve a pedagogical purpose, as it appears to be adapted to the possibilities of understanding on the part of mankind.<sup>59</sup> When Eriugena then faces the problem of how to explain Genesis' double creation of man, as told in Gen.1:26, 27a-b and in Gen.2:7, he declares that the later creation, which he associates indissolubly with the division into male and female of Gen.1:27c and Gen.2:18-23, is recorded only on account of sin, the effects of which he regards as merely 'superadded' to man's original *imago*-character. This appears considerably to diminish the disastrous impact of human sin. It allows Eriugena to believe that the actual restoration of man's paradisaical state is in effect still possible, though he defers it to

<sup>56</sup> *Per.* IV 807A-B: N. *Putasne itaque, Deum simul omnia fecisse? A. Imo credo et intelligo.*

<sup>57</sup> *Per.* IV 808A: *Et si te movet, quare Deus in homine fecerit, priusquam peccaret, quae propter peccatum facta sunt, animadverte, quod Deo nihil est ante, nihil post, cui nihil praeteritum, nihil futurum, nihil medium inter praeteritum et futurum, quoniam ipsi omnia simul sunt.*

<sup>58</sup> Although Eriugena holds that events may be ordered according to time in the sensible world, their time sequence seems rather to be an auxiliary device for man than to belong to the essence of such events. Cf. *Per.* IV 808B: *Homini siquidem non Deo, futurum erat peccatum...*

<sup>59</sup> *Per.* IV 808A: *...cum dicimus ante et post peccatum, cogitationum nostrarum mutabilitatem monstramus...*

the eschatological future. Yet in retrospect, this explanation has the curious side-effect of relieving man to a certain extent from full responsibility for his fall. After all, as Eriugena has it, man never really found himself in a perfect state to which he could hold on. Therefore, he can only strive to achieve the deified state that is promised to him with God's help, i.e. Christ's grace, at the end of times. At this point we previously ended our contemplation of the first stage of Eriugena's anthropology.

Having already come to accept the synchronicity of the events in Genesis, Eriugena is but a step away from the radical conclusion which now follows, namely his declaration that paradise and human nature are in fact identical. The concrete meaning of this allegory in the *Periphyseon* is that the whole paradise narrative, that is the collective stories of man's creation and his subsequent fall and expulsion, is seen as referring exclusively to human nature. We will now analyze how Eriugena actually arrives at this conclusion by tackling the problem of the nature of paradise posed in ch.16 (*Per.* IV 814A ff.). In this chapter the Master quotes from Augustine's *De Genesi*,<sup>60</sup> in which he puts forward three general opinions on paradise: it is said to be corporeal, or spiritual, or to possess a middle nature, which means that some things in it are taken to be corporeal and others to be spiritual. Like Augustine, the Master opts for the middle position which combines both alternatives. Yet, by adducing other quotations from Augustine which he seems almost willingly to misinterpret,<sup>61</sup> he slowly moves to a more spiritual position, as advocated by Ambrose who, he claims, follows Origen.<sup>62</sup> In the final phrasing of his opinion the Master comes to emphasize Ambrose's pregnant statement that:

...he manifestly shows not only that paradise should be understood in a spiritual sense, but even that paradise is nothing other than man himself. (*Per.* IV 815C)

It is this remarkable spiritual interpretation of paradise that the Master henceforth will follow, interpreting the Genesis narrative in close accordance with Ambrose and again Gregory of Nyssa.

Here we have reached what may well be called the heart of Eriugena's allegorical position: the unequivocal equation of paradise with human nature. In consequence, we arrive at an interpretation of man which is entirely different from what we have encountered before. This can best be seen by returning to the problem of human sin. After all, the temporal order of events need not bother us any longer, since all things equally relate to human nature. In order to illustrate the impact of sin on the whole-

<sup>60</sup> Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt.*, VIII, 1,1.

<sup>61</sup> See Augustine's *De civ. dei.*, XIV, 11 and *De ver. rel.*, XX, 38.

<sup>62</sup> See Ambrose, *De paradiso*, 1,5; 2,11; 3,12-14.

ness of man in his allegorical exegesis, the Master can no longer compare man's state before and after sin. Instead he chooses to contrast the spiritual side of man with his corporeal (i.e. material) side. Only the spiritual man is claimed really to belong in paradise. However, the Genesis story cannot be simplified in this manner. Though locating the creation of what the Master views as corporeal man outside paradise (Gen.2:7), it tells how God thereafter plants him inside paradise (Gen.2:8). It is there that God makes the woman who eventually persuades man to commit sin.<sup>63</sup> To harmonize this information from Genesis with the general allegory of paradise, the Master's view has to become rather complicated. In allegorizing the story of paradise he had interiorized it by making it refer entirely to human nature, yet now he is forced somehow to adapt his interpretation. He attempts to refine it, making paradise refer not only to human nature in general, but more specifically to what seems to have been man's original, i.e. truly paradisaical state. The general allegory of paradise as the image of human nature is thereby left intact. Thus he explains the difference between man created in the image of God and man subject to a superadded division, by assuming, within the one setting of paradise (i.e. human nature in general), a distinction between man's intra-paradisaical and his extra-paradisaical state.<sup>64</sup> For the allegorical interpretation of Genesis 1 to 3 this means that, although the setting of paradise still stands for human nature as a whole, only the inner, spiritual part of man can truly be called paradisaical, whereas the outer, corporeal cannot.

Thus we have before us a gradual shift of emphasis from spiritual and corporeal paradise to spiritual and corporeal man. Despite all complications there still is the underlying ideal of one, unequivocal paradise of human nature, which needs to be restored. In *Per.* IV 817C the Master phrases his complex opinion as follows:

M. Since there are two men to be perceived in every man, according to the words of the apostle: 'the outer man is corrupted, but the inner is renewed',<sup>65</sup> the inner man, who is created in the image of God, is deservedly formed in paradise, but the outer and corruptible man is shaped from earthly clay outside and below paradise; but it is said that he was then seized by God and placed in paradise, because, if God had worked his salvation in him and man had observed the divine commandment, he could even have attained the dignity of his superior creation in the image of God. But since he chose not to obey the divine commandment, he not only abandoned his Maker, but also the dignity of the image. And therefore he is split into two sexes, namely male and female: a split not caused by nature, but by his own fault. (*Per.* IV 817C-D)

<sup>63</sup> *Per.* IV 817B.

<sup>64</sup> *Per.* IV 817C.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:22-24.

The earlier distinction between man's pre- and post-lapsarian states is replaced here by that between his internal and external states (as the Master's acceptable alternative to a spiritual *versus* a corporeal paradise). Notwithstanding this difference the Master has left the ultimate unity of human nature, allegorically the general setting of paradise, intact.<sup>66</sup> However, just as before he was little interested in the particulars of a corporeal paradise, so now he is not particularly concerned with the exterior man, even though this exterior man is also placed in paradise, so as to explain his presence there with regard to the superadded division of man into male and female. After all, this division refers to the salvation of man rather than to his downfall. However, the Master himself seems to advocate what is the completely spiritual nature of paradise. This is most obvious when, following Origen, he identifies it with the third heaven to which St. Paul was taken.<sup>67</sup> Let us now see what else he wants to bring out about the inner qualities of man.

To implement his spiritual interpretation of paradise, the Master gives an allegorical interpretation of its various attributes as enumerated in Genesis. For this purpose he quotes again at length from Gregory's *De imagine*. This enables him to elaborate a more precise notion of what is actually meant by the interior man whom paradise specifically represents. He summarizes Gregory as follows:

M. Whoever carefully studies the words of the aforementioned theologian will in my opinion find that they propose nothing other than that divine scripture by the word 'paradise' signifies, in a figurative manner of speaking, the human nature that was made in the image of God. For the true garden of God is represented by that very nature which he created in Eden, that is, in the delights of his eternal felicity, in his own image and likeness, that is, in an image that is completely like himself, except by reason of its subject, as was made clear; and through the blessedness of the divine likeness, human nature is greater and better than the whole sensible world, not in physical magnitude but in dignity of nature. And the fertile earth of this paradise of human nature was the essential body, carrying the possibility of immortality. . . . And the water of this paradise was the sense of the incorrupt-

<sup>66</sup> See Stock 1967: 42ff. I differ from Stock where he emphasizes the historical quality of these two paradisaical views. In my view the allegorical aspect of Eriugena's exegesis is first of all designed to dispense with all (quasi-)historical aspects of paradise, in order to inaugurate what will be an altogether new definition of human nature, see below ch. 4.3.

<sup>67</sup> 2 Cor. 12:2-4. Cf. *Hom. prol. Jean* IV: 218-220. Origen identifies the third heaven with paradise in his commentary on the Song of Songs, *In cant. cant.* I: 109. Explaining the passage '*Introduxit me rex in cubiculum suum*' Origen embarks on an allegorical exposition of the king's chamber saying: *Prope hunc (anima) mihi videtur esse aut sequens eum ille, qui dixit raptum se esse usque ad tertium caelum et inde in paradysum et audisse verba ineffabilia, quae non licet homini loqui.*



ible body able to hold forms, ....the lower air illuminated by the rays of divine wisdom was reason...., the upper air, the mind. (*Per.* IV 822A-C)<sup>68</sup>

The four rivers of paradise obviously represent the cardinal virtues of spiritual man, i.e. prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice, all of which spring from the fountain of divine wisdom. Thus the Master's portrait of what man's paradisaical state was actually supposed to have been like becomes ever clearer, while at the same time we are furnished with an impression of the state to which he will ultimately return.

The explanation of paradise next involves the interpretation of the trees that are planted there.<sup>69</sup> Of all the trees created in paradise (*omne lignum*) Genesis seems to highlight two particular trees: the tree of life planted in the middle of paradise as opposed to the tree of knowledge of good and evil: *Produxitque Dominus Deus de humo omne lignum pulchrum visu, et ad vescendum suave: lignum etiam vitae in medio paradisi, lignumque scientiae boni et mali* (Gen. 2:9)..... *Ex omni ligno paradisi comede. De ligno autem scientiae boni et mali ne comedas, in quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris* (Gen. 2:16b,17). The allegorical interpretation of these trees is of major importance, since in Genesis sin consists explicitly of man's eating from the wrong tree. Man was given permission by God to eat from all trees in paradise except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the penalty for his transgression being death itself. Interpreting this passage, the Master, like Gregory, reduces the paradisaical forest to a total number of only two trees.<sup>70</sup> The first one is the *omne lignum* or the *lignum vitae*. Although *omne lignum* is usually taken as meaning the totality of 'all trees' created in paradise, the Master follows Gregory in saying that Genesis means by this totality only one tree, namely the tree of life, from which man is commanded to eat. He wants to identify this tree with Jesus Christ, who is planted in the middle of the paradise of human nature. The second tree, which Gregory has labelled γνῶστών, i.e. *scibile*, but which the Master prefers to call *mixtum*, is the tree which Genesis refers to as *lignum scientiae boni et mali*. According to the Master, this latter tree is also planted in the middle of the paradise of human nature, yet man is forbidden to eat its fruit.

What is the allegorical significance of these trees for man? Following Gregory the Master explains that man, in his interior together with his ex-

<sup>68</sup> Note that Eriugena enumerates the four elements even in the context of giving an allegorical explanation of paradise. Throughout the *Periphyseon* Eriugena repeatedly mentions the elements, see e.g. *Per.* I 475C-476A, Sh.-W.: 112-114; *Per.* III 663B-664A, Sh.-W.: 126-128.

<sup>69</sup> *Per.* IV 823A-833C.

<sup>70</sup> For Gregory's views of these trees, see *De hom. opif.* ch. 19-20, PG 44, 196C-201A, Laplace: 173-179. Eriugena extensively quotes these chapters in *Per.* IV 819A-821D.

terior qualities, is said to consist of six parts. Man should be divided first into a body and a soul. The body or exterior man has three parts, which are, in ascending hierarchical order: material body, vital motion and the fivefold exterior sense. The interior man, who can ultimately be equated with the human soul, consists of three parts also, which, in ascending hierarchical order, are: interior sense, reason and the soul. The extremes of this wide range of human faculties, namely the material body as the lowest and the soul as the highest part of man, coincide with the outer boundaries of paradise. Beyond these there exists no created nature, but only God and nothing.<sup>71</sup>

One cannot help noticing that the Master's consistent allegory of paradise, shifting the emphasis from the wide variety of nature to the central creature of man, presents man not only as representing all of nature, but as a matter of fact replacing it.<sup>72</sup> Of the two trees which both are planted in the middle of paradise, the *omne lignum*, said to be Christ, is located in man's interior sense, while the *mixtum*-tree is said to belong to the exterior sense. As the highest bodily quality and the lowest spiritual one, man's exterior and interior sense form what is the true centre of human nature. Because of their position at the heart of human nature, the exterior and interior sense of man are the most likely target for sin to strike. To be more explicit, the realm of the interior man may indeed harbour truth and goodness, but the corporeal sense is the abode of *falsitas*, which is the unmistakable source of evil.<sup>73</sup> It is evil, as the force hiding underneath man's act of sin, that needs to be counteracted.

However, the precise impact of evil still needs to be defined.

M. For no part of human nature is receptive to the error of falsehood except the exterior sense, and through it the interior sense, and reason, and even the intellect are very often misled. Therefore, it is in the seat of falsehood and idle fantasies, that is, in the corporeal sense, named αἰσθησις by the Greeks, and represented under the guise of woman, that γνωστόν, i.e. the tree of knowledge of good and evil, is rooted, which is evil camouflaged with the appearance of good, or evil in the form of good, or, simply, a false good, or evil hiding under the guise of good, whose fruit is a mixed, i.e. confused, knowledge. (*Per.* IV 826B)

Evaluating the problem of sin, or actually of man giving evil a chance, the

<sup>71</sup> *Per.* IV 824C-825C.

<sup>72</sup> The allegorical interpretation of paradise here finds its clearest expression. Paradise is entirely absorbed by human nature, the two trees are planted in the middle of human nature.

<sup>73</sup> Evil in itself is not anything substantial according to Eriugena, but it arises from man's mutable rational nature, which may not resist *falsitas*, which is to be located more precisely in the exterior sense, see *Per.* IV 826A-B.

Master finds that man does not commit wrong on purpose. He rather defines sin as the situation in which man can be deceived in his exterior sense, because he does not detect the evil hidden beneath the attractive outer form. The outward appearance of a thing may in itself be good, yet this does not prevent its being used for the wrong purposes. The Master gives the example of a beautiful golden vase, which is beheld by two men.<sup>74</sup> The impression the vase makes on their memory is not evil in itself. Rather, it is the way the two men respond to their sense-impression that determines whether or not evil arises. In a greedy man the sight of the vase will kindle his cupidity, whereas in a noble man it will only lead him to exalt its creator. Therefore, the fruit of the tree called *mixtum*, through the eating of which man's sinful state commences, cannot in itself be bad, since it is after all found in paradise. The danger lies in the fact that this tree presents good mixed with evil, whereby it can deceive man.

Having put forward this argument, the Master attempts retroactively to exonerate human nature from the direct burden of sin. He almost seems to want to deny sin, as he boldly asserts:

M. Therefore, evil is not implanted in human nature, but it is established in the subverted and irrational motion of the rational and free will. And this is not a motion from within human nature, but from outside... (*Per.* IV 828D)

With the judgement *non intra naturam, sed extra* we have finally reached the point where the Master extends his allegory of paradise to tackle the problem of human sin directly.<sup>75</sup> On the basis of the spiritual interpretation of the events in paradise as advocated by Gregory, Maximus and Ambrose, the Master has developed the view that man's fall refers to a process that takes place entirely inside human nature, but is actually directed against it. By this significant remark the Master refers back to man's exterior sense or αἰσθησις, through which the fall of man was in his view actually conducted. As man is persuaded by woman to eat from the forbidden fruit, we see that his mind (the νοῦς) to which his free will is affiliated gives in to his senses (αἰσθησις), thereby heavily disturbing the balance of his original nature.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, there

<sup>74</sup> *Per.* IV 828B-C.

<sup>75</sup> Although I agree with Stock that in the analysis of the trees in paradise (esp. the tree of knowledge of good and evil which is identified as a mixture of good and evil), and the analysis of sin Eriugena has outlined his essential picture of man, I think that Eriugena's original contribution to anthropology only begins there, because from now on he feels free to make his own judgements concerning good and evil. I would not agree that 'all that remains is to fill in a number of details', Stock 1967: 45. See my continuing analysis of Book IV.

<sup>76</sup> The allegory of paradise in which man is seen as the mind and woman as the senses dates back to Philo of Alexandria, *De opif. mund.* 165; *Leg. alleg.* II,73; III,49; cf. Früchtel

is a slant in the scales of human nature that man must try to remedy.

After the Master has complied with the Student's request in ch. 17 (*Per.* IV 829B-830C) to give a summary of his teaching on paradise, he returns in ch. 18 to his concept of a spiritual paradise which, in accordance with Ambrose and Origen, he equates with the third heaven to which St. Paul was rapt. In what is apparently an eschatological view of paradise he envisages for man the future reunion of the mind and the senses (referring to Christ and the Church), which he describes as follows:

M. For divine history mentions only one paradise, and one man created in it, but if we are to follow the words of the holy Fathers we understand that both man and woman are in this one man. The man is the intellect of human nature, which is named νοῦς by the Greeks; the woman is the sense, which is indicated by the feminine gender αἰσθησις: the mystical joining of these foreshadows the future union of Christ and the Church. The divine law not only allowed, but even ordered man and woman, I mean the intellect and the sense, to eat of the tree of life, -the wisdom of the Father and the word, which is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is planted in the middle of the paradise of human nature. He is the spiritual bread which the angels and the human saints gathered in heaven are eating. They are ordered to keep away from the indiscriminate and mixed appetite for good and evil which, from delight in the beauty of material things, clings to imperfect souls: to abstain from it leads to the reward of eternal life, to misuse it gives rise to eternal death. (*Per.* IV 833A-B)

In a straightforward eschatological scheme this passage could very well have been the conclusion of the *Periphyseon's* teaching on paradise, which is interpreted here as representing the well-balanced completeness of *humana natura*. The Master's eschatological view of Christ and the Church foreshadows the restoration of man's unified state in paradise. As it is, however, the Master's allegorical exegesis unexpectedly takes on a much more daring form. The daring impact of his judgement on sin as *non intra naturam, sed extra* becomes undeniably clear, when he continues his argument as follows:

M. But the other things which sacred Scripture has handed down about paradise, although they are said in anticipation and as having occurred in paradise, are better and more reasonably understood to have happened outside paradise after sin, because they are superadded on account of sin, and belong to the outer man. (*Per.* IV 833B-C)

Up to this point the Master, who did most of the reasoning in the latter part of Book IV, has been in line with the authorities he so respectfully quoted on the spiritual conception of paradise, notably Gregory of Nyssa and Ambrose. He is found to reiterate the view that man is created in the

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1968: 39. See Baer 1970 for an extensive discussion of the categories male and female in Philo, esp. 38-39.

image of God and that the division of mankind is merely superadded on account of sin, whereby he declares the man to stand for the mind (or νοῦς) and the woman to stand for the senses (or αἰσθησις). We also saw that he followed Ambrose in placing them both in paradise, since God ultimately needed man there to safeguard the future happiness of mankind as a whole. Just as we previously found that the return of man depended on the mercy of Christ, with whose help man would resurrect at the end of times in an undivided and spiritual body without any traces of superadded sin, so too on this allegorical level it seems that man will overcome his 'sinful' division into mind and the senses in the future unity of Christ and the Church. Yet the Master appears not at all satisfied with an eschatological solution alone. In fact, his allegorical exegesis of Genesis takes us much further, or seen from a different perspective, it does not need to take us quite so far. I already hinted at the important distinction that was made between the outer and the inner man, through which the Master could explain Ambrose's interpretation of why corporeal i.e. sinful man was made outside paradise, although he was later placed in it. We found that in the first stage of Eriugena's anthropology sin was visibly expressed in the division of mankind into male and female. In this allegorical stage it seems to take shape precisely in the hidden difference between an exterior and an interior man. In addition to the total destruction of any temporal order, by which to distinguish between man's pre- and his post-lapsarian state, the story of Genesis now undergoes visible changes in its literary structure. The Master makes use of the synchronicity of events in Genesis to institute a new arrangement with which he can illustrate the actual distinction between man with and without sin.

This new interpretation provides the Master with enormous opportunities. Since he is now totally free to rearrange the events in Genesis. His ultimate guideline is the allegorical interpretation of paradise in terms of human nature, or to be more precise, in terms of man's original character as *imago dei*, his intrinsic rationality. Nowhere in Genesis is this explicitly exemplified, however, which implies that within the given setting of paradise the Master can apply his own criteria to distinguish between what is paradisaical and what is not. Thus he can decide for himself that man's inclination to evil is a *motus extra naturam*, completely foreign to man's innate rationality. From ch.19 (*Per.* IV 833C) onwards he seems to apply this distinction between man's interior and his exterior so rigidly, that the narrative order of Scripture becomes fully subjugated to the purpose of bringing out man's rationality. In consequence, the difference between man with or without sin on this level no longer indicates a definite point of transition, it not even points to the need of divine grace. Rather, the Master seems to want to counteract on the disastrous effects of sin by emphasizing man's underlying rational character, as if thereby to provide a

shield against whatever threatens further to defile human integrity. The exegetical method he puts into practice here is no longer governed by the either historical or literary order of Scripture, but only by the demands of a rational justification of man's *imago*-character. After all, it was man's rational dignity that led God to describe man as created in his own image.

Thus, from ch.19 onwards, the Master steers what is a most unusual and independent course in explaining the words of Genesis. He not only interprets them allegorically, but is concerned most of all with the constant separation of what applies to man's *imago*-character from what is of additional importance only.<sup>77</sup> Thus he draws what may be called a stylized sketch of spiritual man. The mental picture which now arises presents a man who originally did not need to rely on his senses, though he still possessed them, since he could perceive all things directly in their reasons (i.e. primordial causes). He was neither male nor female and did not need to hide his nudity (i.e. the simplicity of his pristine nature) from God or anyone else. In laying down his allegorical views the Master does not hesitate to take the most extreme exegetical positions. Guided by the image of an originally rational man, his exegesis is in conformity with nothing but rational standards.

In *Per.* IV 837A-B he expresses his views most powerfully, when he goes so far as to favour an interpretation which not so much neglects the narrative order of Genesis as requires what would be its exact inversion:

M. Although, as we said, we read all these things which divine Scripture narrates after Adam's enforced sleep as if happening in paradise, it is more in conformity with logic and truth to believe and understand them to be super-added to human nature on account of man's disobedience after sin and thus outside paradise. For if the garden of God and the paradise of delight is human nature made in the image of God and disfigured by no taint of transgression, I do not see why everything made outside the dignity of nature because of sin should not be understood also to have happened outside paradise. I am very well acquainted with the most common trope of divine scripture, which is called ὕστερον πρότερον by the Greeks, but *praeposterum* or *anticipatio* by the Latins, i.e. the Greek προλήψις; the evangelist Matthew also used it, when he told the story of the Lord's passion and resurrection.

The Master does not want to confine this inversion to the story of Genesis. Rather, he extends it to the exegesis of the Gospel. In what follows he interprets St. Matthew's story about the opening of the graves (Matth. 27:50ff.), which Matthew assumes took place before the Resurrection of

<sup>77</sup> Cf. the end of ch.18, *Per.* IV 833B-C: *Cetera vero, quae a sacra Scriptura de paradiso traduntur, quamvis per anticipationem dicta sint, ac veluti in paradiso facta, plus tamen et rationabilius, quoniam merito peccati superaddita sunt, et ad exteriorem hominem pertinent, extra paradysum post peccatum fuisse intelligenda.*

Christ, as if it occurred actually in the period thereafter. The only argument he adduces to support this rhetorical novelty in exegesis is the familiar criterion of sound reasoning (*rationabilis, veritati congruentius*), which thus appears to be the dominant principle in the Master's interpretation of the biblical creation story. He goes so far as to elevate reason to a position above biblical authority, instead of letting his own reasoning be guided thereby, as was still the case in the preceding anthropological stage.

In the end, however, we reach the same conclusion as when the Master first interpreted Genesis. There is again no distinction between man's pre- and post-lapsarian states, for man sinned as soon as he came into being:

M. But if paradise is human nature, created in the image of God and established on an equal footing with the angelic blessedness, then it fell away from the dignity of its own nature as soon as it chose to abandon its Creator. For man began to be presumptuous even before he yielded to his wife. Moreover, if divine history mentions no time interval between man's creation and his fall, what else is to be understood from the silence of Scripture than that man became arrogant and corrupt immediately after his creation? (*Per.* IV 838A-B)

Yet the implications of what is basically the same assumption appear to be far different, when the problem of sin leads to a confrontation of the inner with the outer man. The formal distinction between man before or after sin may have been replaced by the difference between the inner and outer man, but since we are dealing with what is ultimately one human nature, it seems that the criteria with which to discriminate between man with or without sin are rarefied, to the point even of having disappeared completely. This means that the clear distinction between man's pre- and his post-lapsarian state has become transformed into an (onto)logical diffusion of corruption and perfection. As the salvation of mankind is still the prime subject of Genesis, even the Master's most unusual allegorical procedures are intended to lead to the preservation of man's character as *imago dei*. This implies that, with the dignity of man's true *imago*-character located in his rational mind, human rationality is the only criterion left by which one may tentatively distinguish between the interior and the exterior man.

There appears to be one reservation, however. Human rationality, even in the case where it seems to exercise uninhibited control, naturally means a rationality tainted by sin, for in consequence of what we have said in the above there can never be an objective criterion by which to declare any part of the human being, not even the rational soul, to be entirely sinless.

### B. *Man and the Return of Nature*

In consequence of the disappearance of a clear dividing-line not only between man's pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian states, but ultimately also between his state with and without sin, it has become virtually impossible to distinguish between the movements of man's procession and of his return. There seems to be no distinctive mark of man's sinful state, not even a quantitative difference between varying degrees of sin, because human nature appears to have always indulged in material and sensible things rather than in intellectual purity.<sup>78</sup> We are left instead with a portrayal of man that blends perfection and corruption into one. This has wide-ranging consequences. We can no longer distinguish between the end of his procession and the beginning of his return, as we could on a more literal level of exegesis, where there was still a detectable difference between what man was originally intended to be and what he had become after the pollution of sin. This also has its effect on the larger scale of *natura*. Man's original state has been damaged, and because man is seen as representing all of nature, through man all of nature becomes radically and irrevocably tainted by sin. Thus the harmony of the universe is disturbed and, as a result, our vision of the distinction between the end of *natura*'s movement of procession and the beginning of its return is considerably blurred. To obtain a clearer view of the universe's return we can only concentrate on man's *imago*-character, so as to preserve his integrity on the larger scale of *natura*'s harmonious balance.

We have noticed how the Master within the fixed bounds of human nature has wanted to distinguish between the inner and the outer man, the inner referring to man's character as *imago dei*, i.e. his capacity as a rational creature, and the outer indicating man's corrupted state as he is governed by the senses. Since there is no chronological distinction between man's pre- and post-lapsarian states, there is also no fixed point in time at which his procession ends. Neither is there a definite take-off point for the movement of nature's return. Instead, there is adopted a rational criterion by which one can discriminate between man's inner state of integrity and his outer life of the senses, regardless of any time-factors whatsoever. In accordance with this understanding, it can only be through a rational rehabilitation of man that *natura* can start on its movement of return.

Choosing thus to rely completely on the creative resilience of man's rational faculty, Eriugena appears to balance on the edge of what could be

<sup>78</sup> See Eriugena's interest in the etymology of anthropology referring to *ἄνω* = *sursum*, *Per.* V 941D. Man's original position was upright to mark his dignity, cf. *De hom. opif.* ch.8, PG 44, 144A-B, Laplace: 106.



acceptably held in the practice of allegorical exegesis. It is as an elaboration on the theme of rationality that we should analyze the exegetical liberties he takes and his unusual digressions in explaining the biblical narrative. They all indicate an unremitting eagerness to detect some rational meaning behind what is actually, and in his view often irrationally, stated in the Bible. In this manner he tries to salvage as much as possible of reason's accuracy, notwithstanding the severely damaged record of human rational nature. His emphasis on the logical structure of the Bible, his clever recourse to the rhetorical technique of *prolepsis* in interpreting the biblical text, are among the devices he employs to alleviate the blame inflicted on man by sin.

From ch.21 (*Per.* IV 838C) onwards Eriugena sets out to recount the full story of man's creation, fall and expulsion from paradise as found in Gen.2:7 to 3:24, interspersing it with the allegorical comments of Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.<sup>79</sup> Having dealt with particular examples of his teaching on paradise before, I will not take up these matters again, but refer to my earlier explanations instead. Yet it seems worthwhile to point out revealing changes in the tone of Eriugena's rhetoric, which illustrate his growing sense of exegetical liberty. I will briefly describe the fundamental shift of emphasis we encounter here by examining a new dramatism that can be detected in the story of Genesis.

Towards the end of Book IV we can observe a much more vivid representation of the biblical story than we have encountered before. This becomes clear in a more expressive representation of the occurrences in Genesis. A first dramatic highpoint is reached when the Master, who is trying to justify God's reaction to man's irrational act of sin, goes so far as to put himself in the position of God himself, an effective final step in the process of adapting the biblical narrative to a more rational storyline. Here Eriugena's exegesis undoubtedly reaches what is the height of its originality, as the Master does not hesitate to fill in omissions in Genesis or proposes alternative readings in the form of remarks that could very well have been said. A remarkable illustration of this can be found in *Per.* IV 841D-842A. Here the Master is found to play on the familiar theme of *Adam, ubi es?* (Gen. 3:9), elaborating on God's thoughts in uttering it:

M. Adam, where are you? This voice belongs to the Creator who chides human nature. As if he said: Where are you now after your transgression? For I do not find you there, where I know I created you; I do not find you in that dignity according to which I made you in my image and likeness, but I scold you as the deserter of blessedness, who flies from the true light and hides in the dens of a bad conscience, and I will track down the cause of your

<sup>79</sup> This constitutes the remaining part of Book IV, 838C-860C.

disobedience. Do you by chance think I do not notice what you have done, or where you have fled, or how you have hidden yourself in fear of my voice, or how you finally became aware of your nakedness, that is, of the sincere and simple state of the nature in which you were created? Have you not endured all these things, because you have eaten of the tree of which I had ordered you not to eat? For if you had not eaten, perhaps you would not fear the voice of the Creator walking around within you, nor would you fly from his face, nor would you have realized your nakedness, which you lost because you sinned.

After an allegorical explanation of the forbidden tree in paradise in ch.22 (*Per.* IV 842A), it is in ch.23 (*Per.* IV 845A) that the dramatic impact of his exegesis culminates, while at the same time Eriugena manages to achieve a remarkable sense of detachment. In this passage he not only successfully imagines what God might have said, but he even seems to step out of his exegetical role in order to take issue with Adam himself on the matter of his sin. Sorting out the question of man's accountability, Eriugena can no longer content himself with taking excuses from Adam, such as the attempt to put the blame on his wife. Yet it is not personal indignation that seems to be his motive here. This would form a flagrant paradox with his awareness always to leave room for the divine *vox inexplabilis*, not losing any of his exegetical shrewdness. But this time he seems to want to answer this divine inexplicable voice himself rather than representing Adam's feeble subterfuge. Thus it appears that the exegete Eriugena withdraws from the scene altogether, while seemingly unnoticed his voice becomes the arguing voice of human reason itself which tries to face God's question rather than shirking its responsibilities. It is in the ethereal capacity of reason, which by now has fully realized the grave and disastrous impact of sin, that he is able even to reprimand Adam with the full authority of rational justice on his side:

M. I wonder why you say that you do not know these things which have happened because of your disobedience and pride. I, on the other hand, who have sinned in you and have died because of it, do know them. Immutable and all-explicit reason, supported by the authority of many Fathers, exclaims within me that if human nature had remained in that most simple and sincere blessedness of the divine image, it would not have succumbed to sexual distinction, nor would it have endured this insulting manner of procreating like dumb animals. (*Per.* IV 846A)

It is only when it has realized its own position that human reason can grow so detached as to see something like divine 'irony' behind man's division in the sexes. Only when it has realized its own position can human reason have the temerity to act upon the biblical text as if it was meant only to remind man of the fact that God had foreseen his sin and was prepared even to co-operate, as it were, by fulfilling his divine share:

M. But because it [i.e. human nature] did not want to continue in that dignity in which it was created but chose to multiply among the other animals in an ignoble fashion, the selfsame creator, foreseeing everything that man would do or be, condemned by the perverted motion of his free will, superadded sexual distinction, so that he could procreate like the beasts..... Divine irony undoubtedly makes this clear when it says: 'It is not good that man is alone, let us make him a helper who is like him'. (*Per.* IV 846A-B)

Explaining the Genesis phrase (2:18) further, Eriugena fills this out more elaborately:

M. Let us then make him a helper like unto him, with whom he can accomplish that which he desires to do, I mean a woman, fragile and unsteadfast like the man, longing also after earthly lusts. (*Per.* IV 846C)

Although this example of divine irony,<sup>80</sup> becoming tangible to the point of sheer mockery, does not discredit the previously stated opinion that God had divided man only to save him, i.e. by letting the full number of humans come into being, it is used here to serve a purpose that is entirely different. Invoked as a rhetorical expedient, the 'divine irony' functions almost hyperbolically to reveal to man that there is eventually no way around fully admitting his sin. Thus Eriugena has managed again to heighten the intrinsic rationality of the Genesis story.

It is for this very reason that Eriugena finally attaches great importance to man's unwavering acceptance of his blame, and reacts vehemently against his various excuses.

M. For such a removal of the crime does not form a case for your defence, but rather adds to the heap of condemnation. (*Per.* IV 846D)

To return to his old state of perfection, man will have to undergo the humiliation of facing his own position, since in the end he cannot deny responsibility for his own fall. This fall will ultimately bring him to a new awareness of self, as he must learn how to cope with being a divided creature. In this respect it is noteworthy that Eriugena, after stating the sinful origin of man's sexual division, goes on to defend marriage, thereby implicitly sanctioning man's bestial method of propagation. But on the allegorical level we are concerned most of all with how man's responsible acceptance of his fall brings with it the complete acceptance of man's division into a rational and a sensory side to his nature.

When following the text of Genesis we should notice that, although man and woman have collaborated on the perpetration of sin and are therefore both found guilty, neither Adam (i.e. reason) nor Eve (i.e. sense) get

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<sup>80</sup> See Jeaneau's analysis of this passage in Allard 1986: 15-17.

condemned by God on account of their crime. Only the serpent (i.e. carnal concupiscence) is condemned. The reason for this is:

M. Indeed God does not curse the things he made, but blesses them; for the mind and the senses are God's creation. But carnal delight originates outside divine creation, from the irrational passions of the human soul, and is therefore subject to the rigour of divine judgement, for it falls upon the nature made by God from the outside. What else is the divine curse than the just and irrevocable condemnation of the things which are outside nature and pollute it? (*Per.* IV 848C-D)

Although they do not become inflicted with damnation, since they are divine creations, man and woman still receive punishment. It is this punishment which leads more or less directly to their expulsion from paradise. It thereby begins the movement of man's return on this level. Neither the utterance of this malediction nor the implementation of the punishment are definite forms of condemnation, for as Eriugena has it, God shows more mercy than vengeance: *in quibus plus misericordiae intelligitur quam vindictae* (*Per.* IV 849B).<sup>81</sup> Though pretending to be quite content with the exegesis of the Church Fathers, the Master, who does not want to give the impression of knowing any better than they did, is still persuaded to give his own rational views on the subject.

From ch.24 to 27, where Eriugena interprets Gen.2:14b-17, we find hints at the future return of man to God and of the return of nature to God through man, although the bulk of the discussion of *natura's* return is deferred to Book V. But as from Book IV ch.24ff. (*Per.* IV 849D) we can see Eriugena starting to remove most obstacles that could be in the way of man's development as an incorruptible rational creature. First of all he must deal with the serpent, who is the most obvious cause of sin. The serpent is sentenced from now on to go on his belly. By this Eriugena condemns the so-called 'vainglorious and inflated literal philosophy'. Notwithstanding this its corrupted reign over man will be powerful and will end only at the return of Christ, who liberates man, or else at the end of the world, when all of human nature will be restored in its previous state. In the meantime there will be continuous enmity between the woman (i.e. the perfect sense) and her seed (i.e. the natural knowledge of visible things) on the one hand and the serpent and its seed on the other, indicating that the number of offences caused by delight in material things will be steadily growing. The woman will crush the serpent's head; the senses will discriminate between good and evil and arrive at the perfection of action and contemplation. Thus they will finally undermine the effective-

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<sup>81</sup> This phrase recurs more often in the *Periphyseon*. See *Per.* V 864B; 953B. See also *Per.* II 540B-C, Sh.-W.: 36-38.

ness of material delight. The serpent will strike the woman's heel (i.e. the fivefold corporeal sense), because it will pose a constant threat for the senses to go astray again, just as when they first tempted the woman into eating from the forbidden fruit.

Genesis goes on to highlight the infliction imposed on the woman of having to go through labour in childbirth. Allegorizing this, Eriugena explains that man, instead of grasping things through immediate contemplation, will in the future have to go through a painstaking process of reasoning. He will have to draw upon the corporeal senses before he can gradually ascend to his interior reason. In the subsequent pronouncement that woman will be dominated by man, Eriugena detects a predication of the return of man's original, natural state in which the mind was in control of the senses. Thus he says in *Per.* IV 856A:

M. But on the restoration of our nature, when it is recalled to its natural order, this distance and separation between the mind and the senses will change into the peace of a spiritual and natural bond, when the body will be subject and obedient to the senses, the senses to the mind, and the mind to God.

The final part of Eriugena's teaching on paradise interpreted as human nature concerns the analysis of the earth (i.e. *terra*). This notion of 'earth' had already played a role of some significance at the beginning of Book IV, when Eriugena interpreted Gen. 1:24: *Producat terra animam viventem in genere suo*. Searching for a spiritual interpretation of the condemned earth in Genesis 3, Eriugena now turns once again to Maximus the Confessor,<sup>82</sup> who in his *Scholia* associates the earth with Adam's flesh (referring to the trials and tribulations of a sensory and material life in which man has to eat his bread through the sweat of his brow), or with Adam's heart which has endured the deprivation of the celestial goods and needs purification before it can gain knowledge and eat the bread of sacred theology.<sup>83</sup> Eriugena extends Maximus' doctrine to apply the act of purgation not only to the days of this life, but also to the period after death and before the general resurrection. Ultimately he identifies the earth to which man will return with the ensemble of primordial causes, as it is from those that man first drew his origin. Until his return man will have to continue his rational search for the truth, as is stated in *Per.* IV 858B:

M. For all this time your face, i.e. the rational inquiry into truth, will sweat from the labours of your purification through [the first two mystical stages

<sup>82</sup> For an overview of Maximus' anthropology, see Thunberg 1965: 100-178 (his general anthropology); 352-459 (man's task of mediation).

<sup>83</sup> Eriugena calls the *Quaestiones in Thalassium* of Maximus the Confessor by the name of '*scholia*' because he misunderstood the 'prologue to the scholies' that preceded the *Quaest. Th.* He considered it as a general introduction to the *Quaest. Th.* See CCG VII: XCIX-CI. See also Sciscitatio V.

of] action and science, until you are converted to the earth from which you are taken, that is the immutable stability of the primordial causes from which you draw your origin. For you will sweat no longer once you have arrived there.

By 'earth' Eriugena ultimately means the felicity of eternal life and the stability of the primordial causes, from which all things come into being. It is to this earth, which in *Per.* IV 860A he equates specifically with man's spiritual nature, that man will eventually return. Given the unchallenged central position of man in the Eriugenian universe, it may be expected that all of *natura* will follow in his train.

### C. Summary

By way of summary we can describe the allegorical level of Eriugena's anthropology in the following manner. In accordance with the teaching of, among others, Ambrose and Origen, Eriugena adopts the view that paradise should be identified with human nature. More concretely this means that of the human *dramatis personae* in paradise, man comes to be equated with the mind (i.e. *animus* or νοῦς), whereas the woman represents the senses (i.e. *sensus* or αἴσθησις). Man's sin on this allegorical level implies his fall from a life of the intellect to a life of the senses, so that he becomes increasingly dominated by carnal concupiscence and material delight. The return on this allegorical level inaugurates a movement back to the mind, since the mind is the only true *imago dei*, and it is only on account of sin that man is in need of sensory information before he can reach the state of direct contemplation. Since there would have been no division into male and female without sin, there could also not have been a distinction between the mind and the senses without it.

However, because of sin there is an obvious breach in the original integrity of human nature. Yet because of the allegorical interpretation of paradise, this does not correspond to an external distinction between man's pre- and his post-lapsarian state, for the boundaries of paradise converge with the boundaries of man. Human nature appears to be an impenetrable mixture of corruption and perfection. This indirectly comes to affect the harmony of the whole universe, for a clear distinction between its procession and its return cannot be discerned. The only way in which Eriugena can elucidate the return of man is firstly, by distinguishing between what he terms the inner and the outer man, the latter referring to the life of the senses while the former embodies the life of the mind, and secondly, by attempting subsequently to salvage and renew man's *imago*-character by steering a rational course. As man's *imago*-character is explicitly located in the life of the mind, the only criterion to rely on is the

criterion of rationality which functions as the only authority for establishing the true meaning of Scripture.

On this basis Eriugena then sets out to practise a new, radically liberal exegesis of Genesis. The only guidance he wishes to accept seems to be his own rational view of the purpose and meaning of the text, to which he does not hesitate even to apply rhetorical techniques such as *prolepsis*,<sup>84</sup> if this chances to suit his rational analysis any better. In this manner he can interpret the creation of woman as referring specifically to the period after man's sin, since he assumes that in his original state man did not need the use of his corporeal senses. Adam's soporific sleep thus comes to prefigure the actual creation of the woman, because it refers to man's directing of the mind to material things. It is especially when man attempts to shirk the responsibility for his own sin, that Eriugena wants not to aggravate the damnation that has already been inflicted on man by having him carry out a misdirected defence. Only by realizing the full extent of his crime in a rational way as befits his original character as *imago dei* is there some room left for man to re-establish his lost integrity. In Eriugena's final interpretation of Genesis all hope of achieving the restoration of man's dignity is not yet lost. In the divine words on the occasion of man's expulsion from paradise Eriugena detects indications prefiguring man's impending return to the primordial causes rather than the resounding doom of man's greatest catastrophe. In the last chapter (below ch. 5.2., 5.3.) we will deal more explicitly with Eriugena's precise understanding of the return of man and of the ensuing return of nature through man.

Eriugena's allegorical interpretation of paradise in Genesis has taken us back to the primordial causes. To guarantee the effectiveness of the movement of man's return, we will now have to see how man's position with regard to the primordial causes is established. Only then will we be able to undertake the final step back to God.

#### *4.3. Man as the Reflective Subject of Nature: Knowledge, Self-Knowledge and Return. A Theophanic Approach to Human Nature, Periphyseon IV, chs. 7 to 10*<sup>85</sup>

##### *A. The Position of Man*

So far we have dealt with man on two different levels of nature. In our

<sup>84</sup> Pagels 1988: 93-94 points to a similar switching of the order of Scripture in Jerome's *Against Jovinian*, where Jerome wants to prove that in Gen. 2 marriage was instituted after sin instead of before sin. In Eriugena, however, it is the philosophical implication of the total effacement of the differences between the states before and after sin which makes this rhetorical procedure noteworthy.

<sup>85</sup> In this section I will leave ch. 10 outside my analysis, since it does not contain information that is directly relevant to the discussion here. However, as I consider it in essence

first approach to Eriugena's anthropology we focused on man as an integral part of the species of *natura non creans et creata*, of which he was the last creature to come into being. Since man was the end of nature's out-flowing movement, it seemed quite logical that nature's return should start with this very same creature. The dominant feature of man seen on this level was the unity of his being, which combined an animal nature with the reflection of the divine (*imago dei*). In effect this unity ended with man's actual coming into being, for having foreknowledge of human sin God had decided to make man come into being divided into male and female. As a result of this division the movement of return for man was seen to concern first of all the restoration of his original integrated and unbroken unity, as a necessary step before man could actually lead nature back to God. Eriugena found the return of man foreboded by the Incarnation and Redemption of Christ, but thought it would be effectuated only at the end of time, when there would be a general resurrection, and all men would rise in their former undivided spiritual bodies.

In our second approach to Eriugena's anthropology we dealt with Eriugena's allegorical exegesis. In his allegorical interpretation he claims the complete identification of paradise and human nature. Paradise should not be seen as a terrestrially confined area, but as a metaphorical framework surrounding human nature. As a result of this view all the effects constituting the third species of nature virtually disappeared from the surface of *natura*. They were all compressed into the last creature, which thus appeared to represent the entire created universe in a sort of a contracted form. In Eriugena's allegorical exegesis, the boundaries of paradise coincide with those of human nature, which seems as all-embracing as general *natura*: above them there is only God, below them there is the abyss of total nothingness. As there is no longer a chronological distinction between man's pre-and post-lapsarian states, there is in consequence no longer a clear dividing-line between man's original state of perfection and the corruption that follows from his fall. Perfection and corruption have in fact become undistinguishably blended in human nature. In the course of the *Periphyseon*'s dynamic account of nature, the fall of human nature functions as a negative catalyst, for it precipitates man's change from a life of the intellect to a life of the senses. In accordance with Ambrose, who is said to follow Origen, and with Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena has come to interpret man in Genesis as the human mind or νοῦς, whereas the woman represents the senses or αἰσθησις, which first became attracted by the serpent's delight. Thus the story of happiness and sin appears to be set within the bounds of human nature, breaking its unity up into contrastive parts, as the desire of the mind conflicts with that of the senses.

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to be a mere elaboration on the end of ch.9, I think it belongs in this section rather than in section 4.1.



Unlike the situation described on the previous level, where the return of man implied the restoration of a lost condition (which was discernible though it had never been realized), on this level the return of man, by stressing the role of the mind as opposed to the senses, has led to Eriugena's adoption of the Pauline distinction between an inner and an outer man. In his view the inner man represents man's original existence, where the mind was still in command of the senses, while the outer man stands for man as he has become prey to the senses. The inner man is regarded as the true *imago dei*, whose image-character is located in his human rationality. In consequence, Eriugena should attempt to salvage man's integrity through a rational process. His argument for doing so is that man has defiled his original uncorrupted state of being, having thereby lost his power of direct contemplation. Henceforth he is dependent on information he draws from the senses, among which reason has to navigate between right and wrong. By assuming an emphatic contrast between the inner and the outer man in the aforesaid manner, Eriugena wants ultimately to re-establish the nature of the original man. Setting out to do so he grudgingly accepts the use of the senses, but presents them as completely subjugated to the authority of the human mind. Therefore, since in drawing the distinction between an inner and outer man human rationality is the only firm criterion to go by, Eriugena can legitimize the development of his own rational exegesis of Genesis, unhesitatingly pressing forward no matter how liberal his views may turn out to be.

I have tried to bring out Eriugena's growing confidence in the use of rational arguments by pointing out the increasing dramatic impact of his analysis of Genesis, which in my view directly matches the liberality of his exegesis. The culmination of this dramatism can be found at the end of Book IV, where we see how Eriugena wants to read nothing less than the equivalent of an unambiguous prediction of man's ultimate return in God's last words to man before his expulsion from paradise. For him this means in fact a return to the primordial causes, as it is from these that man had effectively drawn his origin.<sup>86</sup> We are thus faced with a portrayal of man as a being whose position needs to be firmly established on the level of the primordial causes. At this stage of our study it goes without saying that God's promise on the subject of man's return, which Eriugena finds embedded in the divine punishment, equally concerns the fate of the rest of the created universe.

Naturally, we now must proceed to discuss man's position on the level

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. *Per.* II 536A-B, Sh.-W.: 28, where Eriugena quotes from Maximus on the position of man as uniting all of creation: *Ad hoc igitur quantum ex praedicti magistri sermonibus datur intelligi inter primordiales rerum causas homo ad imaginem dei factus est...*

of the primordial causes, as it is the link with this level that can secure man's return.<sup>87</sup> To introduce this discussion, we have to go back to Eriugena's disentangling of man's remarkable dual nature, as he is a rational as well as an animal being. The context in which Eriugena broaches the matter of man's position on the level of the primordial causes is that of a comparison between human and angelic nature.<sup>88</sup> The Student asks why man is made in the genus of animals and is not, for example, like the angels. This might have seemed a much more likely thing for God to do, given the lofty task man was supposed to fulfill as the divine image and appointed head of creation: the angels are not burdened by terrestrial bodies, nor do they have to make use of corporeal senses. Instead they contemplate the reasons of things directly. However, men and angels are in the end not too far apart, for it is promised that the saints will share in the future happiness of an angelic life. Yet, on the whole the Master wants to put man above the angels on account of his broader nature, as he possesses an animal alongside his rational nature. In this way he is said to stand for the entire created universe.

We have already seen that in answering possible objections to the central position of the creature of man, the Master pointed to the autonomy of God's will. God apparently wanted to create man as an animal in whom he expressed his own image.<sup>89</sup> To this the Master now adds that man embodies the entire created universe. When explaining this unique position of man, he declares that, though he cannot give God's ultimate reason for creating man the way he did, he is perfectly able to detect what it was that God actually accomplished by creating man:

M. He has made every creature, visible and invisible, in man, so that we should understand the whole universe of created nature [i.e. including the angels] to be in this same man..... Thus if God had not created man in the genus of animals, or if he had not placed the whole nature of all animals in man, how could the whole of creation, visible and invisible, be comprehended in him? It is therefore reasonable for us to say that God wanted man in the genus of the animals because he wished to create every creature in him. If you ask me why he wanted every creature to be created in man, I answer that he wanted to fashion man in his own image and likeness so that, just as the principal model transcends all things by virtue of the excellence of its essence, his image would transcend all things by virtue of the dignity and the grace of its creation. (*Per.* IV 763D-764B)

<sup>87</sup> See for a further discussion of the *Per.* IV ch.7ff. McGinn 1977:319-325, Gracia 1978: 158-166.

<sup>88</sup> *Per.* IV 762C (ch.7 ff.).

<sup>89</sup> *Per.* IV 763C: ...*quia ita voluit eum condere.... Cur autem ita voluit quisquis quaerit, divinae voluntatis causas quaerit, quas quaerere nimis praesumptivum est atque superbum. Quis enim cognovit sensum Domini?* (Rom. 11:34).

The Student immediately accepts his Master's arguments, which for him sufficiently explain how man was created in God's image. But he does not quite understand whether all things are understood as actually subsisting in man according to their essences, or to their accidents, or both. The Master and his Student now engage in a further discussion of this problem.<sup>90</sup>

This discussion brings up the general problem of the nature of human knowledge and the extent and the accuracy of its representational character. In this context the Master asks the following question:

M. Do you think that everything that can be known by intellect or reason, or imagined by corporeal sense, can somehow be created and produced in the understanding and sensory person? (*Per.* IV 765C)

The Student answers in the positive, yet his answer raises the question of the difference between the things themselves and knowledge of them, since it is clearly not to be assumed that these are identical. After some reflection the Student determines that, according to reason, things that understand are always better than that which is understood. In fact, even the knowledge of the things understood is still better than the things themselves. However, the right *ordo* of knowledge, which the Student takes for granted, cannot be so easily applied to the position of the liberal arts, which the Master brings up next. Despite what seems to have been agreed upon, one cannot hold the view that the knowledge brought about by the liberal arts is of a higher nature than the arts themselves. Unless one would like to argue that the arts are formed by knowledge rather than generating knowledge themselves. This latter suggestion being entirely out of the question, the Master and his Student embark on a discussion of the mind, and how its knowledge actually comes about. For this purpose they make a distinction between the faculty of the human mind, its skill (*peritia*) and its art (*disciplina*), pursuing particularly the question how these relate to one another. They reach the conclusion that it is definitely the mind that understands the art, though it remains unclear whether the mind understands with the help of its skill or whether the mind's skill should be seen as a mere part of its understanding. Thus the nature of the mind still needs to be further considered.<sup>91</sup>

The next conclusion they reach is that the human mind is of a simple nature, yet the skill of learning never ceases to be inherent in it. This does not prevent the mind from being affected by things of an accidental nature, for it is proven sometimes to be mistaken or uneducated, though the skill of learning and also learning itself for that matter are at all times

<sup>90</sup> *Per.* IV 764C ff.

<sup>91</sup> *Per.* IV 766C.

essential to it. The Student perseveres in this opinion despite the uneducated state some men may be found in. In a remarkable way he seems to extend the reach of the mind and its inherent qualities in order to counter-balance effectively the ignorance that has befallen man on account of sin. He states this in the strongest possible terms, as he raises the possibility of reform for man:

S. Even though the mind seems to be born with neither experience nor knowledge as a result of the transgression of the divine command by which it became forgetful of itself and its Creator, it can nevertheless recover its God and itself, and its skill and its discipline, and all things naturally subsisting in it, when it is reformed by the rules of doctrine and illuminated by the mercy of its Redeemer. (*Per.* IV 767C)

Notwithstanding the damaged recall of human knowledge as a result of sin, man's natural learning abilities are presented as if they were fundamentally unaffected, i.e. as long as there still is the opportunity that they can be reformed by the rules of doctrine. Since the mind will always possess the skill of learning, and learning itself, even when degraded by the effects of sin, the Master and his Student think it just not to speak simply of the mind, but instead to infer the existence of a trinity of the mind, which consists of the mind, its skill and its learning, which are all of one essence.<sup>92</sup> In an attempt to elaborate the relationship between these, the Master says that, while the mind can understand its skill and its art, these in turn can only partially understand the mind. They can know only that it is, not what it is.<sup>93</sup>

The mental trinity that is so ingeniously proposed here is not entirely self-contained, because it is ultimately formed by and for the sake of the divine mind. Moreover, it is also to be found inside it:

M. Only the divine mind possesses in itself a true knowledge of the human mind learned as a result of its instruction, formed by it and directed towards it. (*Per.* IV 768A)

While we previously had to deal only with the distinction between the knowledge of things and the things themselves, the discussion on the mental trinity opens up an altogether new perspective. The dichotomy between the mind and its learning that was formerly assumed appears to point to the same underlying essence. This then provides the necessary background to understand the Master's next step. Given the presence of

<sup>92</sup> Compare this with the three motions of the soul, see *Per.* II 570A-579A, Sh.-W.:100-120.

<sup>93</sup> *Per.* IV 767D: *Mens itaque et peritiam et disciplinam suam intelligit, et a sua peritia suaque disciplina intelligitur, non quid, sed quia est; aliter enim coessentialis et coequalis Trinitas non erit.*

man's mental trinity in the divine mind and the established equality of the mind and its learning, the Master claims that the human mind and its notion in the divine mind must be essentially one and the same. As an ultimate implication of this step, the human mind is firmly rooted in the divine, which in turn the Master regards as the agency with the definitely superior nature:

S. But indeed I understand that the substance of the whole man is nothing other than the notion of him in the mind of his Maker, who knew all things in himself before they came into being; and this knowledge is the true and only substance of the things that are known, because in this knowledge they are most perfectly made and eternally and immutably subsist.

M. Thus we can give the following definition of man: Man is a certain intellectual notion eternally made in the divine mind. (*Per.* IV 768B)

Thus the human mind and its notion in the divine mind are set alongside each other, from which it can be deduced that the creature of man is ultimately reducible to a mere notion in the divine mind. Man's essential reality appears finally to be determined through his definition as a divine idea. Abiding by the rules of true definition,<sup>94</sup> this conclusion confirms that man is, while it remains unable however to grasp what he is. Thus the Master defines man in exactly the same way as he originally defined *natura*, that is, by evoking its infinite possibilities without enclosing them. The only being left who can transcend man in this pre-eminent position is God himself, for apart from the notion of man he contains in his mind the notions of all created things. According to his definition man is in the final analysis to be ranked as one of these. Thus what the Master has in fact proclaimed here becomes clear: it is man's definitive foundation as one of the primordial causes.

By placing the establishment of man's being before he was actually created in the spatio-temporal world the Master draws us away from man's situation in paradise, tarnished as it is through the occurrence of sin. Although this does not mean that he wants to deny sin, it is quite clear that he wants to safeguard man's true rational nature by anchoring it firmly in the mind of the divine. Thus man is seen as one of the eternal primordial causes. In this capacity he seems to approach God very closely, since the structure of the human mind accurately reflects the divine Trinity. This triadic structure of the human mind appears to be retained always, even if man's natural control over his mental facilities is considerably weakened on account of sin. Like an eternal primordial cause, man's intelligible character is at all times guaranteed by its being encompassed in the divine mind. In consequence, the active power of the human in-

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<sup>94</sup> *Per.* IV 768C.

tellec is also secured. Because man is the image of God, his dynamic nature is not exhaustively to be defined by its mere presence in the divine mind. As well as being an intelligible notion, man is himself the receptacle of the notions of all created sensible and intelligible things, inasmuch as he possesses the power to understand all these.<sup>95</sup> Basing his argument on man's function in Genesis as name-giver in paradise, the Master holds that man effectively contains the notions of created nature in his own mind, and what is more, that his very understanding of them turns out to be their true substance. In this interpretation, all of creation is bound to disappear completely into the human mind.<sup>96</sup> At the same time, however, this man-centred view puts creation's existence severely at risk, for because of man's sin the attainment of true knowledge has as yet remained hidden from him. Only when man returns to God will he be able to attain wisdom, i.e. in the view of Boethius, the comprehension of the truth of the things that are, which partake in its immutable substance.<sup>97</sup> Man, however, has not achieved this secure position yet.

The Student continues the discussion, which as yet seems to have raised more questions than it can answer. The major problem, in his view, appears to be man's knowledge of self, which can be seen as the juncture where the two definitions of man found thus far meet.<sup>98</sup> For we have seen that, on the one hand, man is a notion eternally preserved in the divine mind, whereas on the other hand he is said to contain the notions of all created things within his own mind. For this two-tier transmission of knowledge (i.e. from the created effects through their intelligible notions to the human mind, and from man through his intelligible notion to the divine mind) to function effectively, the crucial position of man needs to be entirely clear. It is precisely when we come to the issue of self-knowledge that the two definitions of man which we have encountered seem not only to overlap, but even directly to contradict each other. If the notions in the human mind provide the true substance of things, then man's notion of self must be his true substance, but how does that compare with the definition whereby man himself is a notion in the divine mind? The Master refuses to detect any controversy here, holding that both statements are simultaneously true. He explains their difference by saying that they refer to different levels of nature. Every creature can be

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<sup>95</sup> *Per.* IV 768C-D.

<sup>96</sup> This would mean a return to the earlier description of man as containing the whole of the created universe within himself, cf. *Per.* IV 755B. However, the danger that man can effectively annihilate creation's existence on account of his sin makes his representation of creation in view of its future return far more complicated on this level.

<sup>97</sup> *Per.* IV 769C; cf. Boethius, *De instit. arith.*, Proem.

<sup>98</sup> *Per.* IV 770A-B.

regarded either in God's word, i.e. as a primordial cause, or in itself, i.e. as an effect on the level of *natura creata et non creans*.<sup>99</sup> While this does not therefore imply the assumption of two substances of man, it does leave open the possibility that the substance of man can be variously understood.

The Master further explains this:

M. For there is a difference between the perception of human substance through its creation among the intellectual causes and through its generation among the effects. In the first case it is free from all mutability, in the second it is subject to it. In the first case simple and free from all accidents, it escapes all observation and knowledge, while in the second it receives some sort of arrangement from quantities and qualities, and other things that can be understood in relation to it, so that the mind can have an understanding of it. (*Per.* IV 771A)

While this explanation of the Master's can be understood rather easily, his next conclusion takes us quite by surprise. He states that, wherever man is to be perceived, in the causes or in the effects, he must remain ultimately incomprehensible. Man appears not to succumb to the grasp of any intellect or sense, not even his own, so as to disclose what he really is. When the Student asks how man, given that he is unaware of what he actually is, can still have a notion of himself and also contain learning within himself, the Master answers that both claims are equally true: man both knows and knows not at the same time. In fact, the very interplay of knowledge and ignorance appears to elevate man more and more to a position closely resembling the divine.

M. Reason teaches us beyond doubt that both these things are true: the human mind both knows itself and does not know itself. For it knows that it is, but it does not know what it is. And therefore, as we explained in our earlier books, the image of God is taught above all to be in man. (*Per.* IV 771B)

Man is like God in that he can be known as to that he is, but not as to what he is, not even by himself.<sup>100</sup> If there is still enough reason to extol man's praise, as is obviously the case in the *Periphyseon*, the reason for this lies more in the striking feat of his ignorance than in the extent of his actual knowledge. It is the negative aspect that eventually brings man closer to God.

<sup>99</sup> *Per.* IV 770B-C: *Aliter enim omnis creatura in Verbo Dei, in quo omnia facta sunt, consideratur, aliter in seipsa*. For the equation of the Divine Word with the ensemble of the primordial causes see *Per.* II 592A-C, Sh.-W.: 14.

<sup>100</sup> On knowledge and ignorance in man and God, cf. *Per.* II 585B-588A, Sh.-W.: 134-140. See also McGinn 1977.

M. Indeed it is more praiseworthy for the human mind not to know what it is than to know that it is, just as negation is better and more appropriately suited to praise the divine nature than affirmation, and not to know it is wiser than to know it, since ignorance of it is true wisdom and it is known better when we have no knowledge of it;<sup>101</sup> Therefore the divine likeness is explicitly recognized in the human mind when all that is known is that it is, while what it is is not known. What it is is denied in it as it were, while all that is affirmed is that it is. And this is not without logic. For if it would be known through definition, it would also be confined within a particular thing. It would thus fail completely to express in itself the image of its Creator, who is altogether beyond definition and who cannot be understood in anything because he is infinite, above everything that can be said or understood, superessential. (*Per.* IV 771C-D)

Since man is the divine image, he should as such reflect God's superessential and uncircumscribed character, which cannot be captured in positive statements, being conveyed most adequately through negative claims. With negation prevailing over affirmation with regard to God, man is in consequence also far better known by his not-knowing. Like God, he defies any attempt at definition, which would enclose his being and thereby unjustifiably encroach on his divine-like nature. As ignorance turns out to be the most appropriate form of knowing, it can be seen to take on the shape of true wisdom.<sup>102</sup>

### *B. The Return of Man*

The consequences of this philosophical position for the evaluation of man are enormous. We previously noticed how man's position as the receptacle of the notions of all created things was put at risk when the accuracy of his knowledge became negatively affected by his sin. This then posed a severe threat to the harmony of the entire universe, as it was through man, i.e. through the underlying integrity of his knowledge, that creation had to be funnelled back into God. As yet man has proved unable to reach the state of true wisdom. However, when the laws of negative theology are invoked to apply to man as well as to God, it seems that for man ignorance coincides with true wisdom: Since man derives his being immediately from God, as he was created in his image, he must be like God, i.e. incomprehensible in himself. A faint knowledge of man's being can to a certain extent be derived from 'circumstantial' evidence (which means that we can know the accidents of man's nature), but his true sub-

<sup>101</sup> Augustine, *De ordine* II, 16. 44: *Deus, qui melius nesciendo scitur.*

<sup>102</sup> By a variation on the Boethian definition of true wisdom which we encountered in *Per.* IV 769C, it appears that for Eriugena wisdom can best be circumscribed in dialectical terms: it can either be knowledge of the things that are not, or ignorance of the things that are.



stance will always escape the grasp of the rational intellect. The remarkable consequence of wisdom being here disguised for man as true ignorance is that there appears to be no difference whatsoever between what is the effect of sin and what the evaluation of a superior character. For their expression both claims resort indiscriminately to the same negative statements. Therefore, the Master and his Student are left in the dark, because there has still not been found a direct approach for the rational intellect to achieve perfect knowledge of man. Thus they have to continue their search, in order to find still further ways of receiving knowledge of man.

With the inquisition of human nature continuing, at this point in the discussion the Student asks the well-known question why creation was created in man and not e.g. in the angels. The Master answers that man reflects more facets of creation than the angels. He then gives an enumeration of human qualities which are lacking in the angels:

M. In man we definitely see many things which neither tradition's authority nor reason's understanding suggest exist in angels. Take for instance this animal body, which divine Scripture testifies adjoined to the human soul even before sin, or also the fivefold exterior bodily sense, or the appearances of sensible things, which are fixed onto the human soul through the senses, or the obscurity and slow dullness of man's reasoning process when trying to understand the nature of things, or its industrious ingenuity in discerning virtues and vices, and there are more examples of the same type. It is immediately clear that the angelic essence is devoid of all these, and yet no man of true wisdom<sup>103</sup> will deny that they belong to the nature of things. (*Per.* IV 772C-D)

The distinctive qualities of man cited here are, in addition to his animal body (which, it should be noted, was originally a spiritual one), the use of the exterior senses, the need first to derive sense-impressions from things and then to go through a reasoning process by which to distinguish right from wrong. All this does not concern the angels, whose knowledge seems to be more a static contemplation of intelligible things, elevated above the spatio-temporal world. The angels are eternally beholding the truth, for which man, in turn, has to plough through a painstaking process of ratiocination, whose efficacy is continuously undermined by the intrusion of deceptive phantasies.

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<sup>103</sup> It is not quite clear who Eriugena means by *sapientes*. In general it seems to indicate that he is in line with the Greek tradition as opposed to the Latin. It clearly serves to strengthen his arguments, cf. *Per.* IV 755B: *Constat enim inter sapientes in homine universam creaturam contineri*, which is a Greek thought, as both Gregory and Maximus are of this opinion. In *Per.* IV 758B Eriugena uses the same phrase (*quis recte sapientium ignoravit?*) when expressing the view, like Gregory of Nyssa, that the visible world was created for man to preside over.

The angelic nature evidently does not boast this same diversity of qualities. Therefore it is decided that man alone should qualify for the central position in the universe, as in him all creatures can be found reflected:

S. ...that man was not brought forth in the genus of animals, but rather that the whole animal genus was brought forth from the earth, i.e. the solidity of nature, in man - and not only was the whole animal genus made in man, but even the created universe... (*Per.* IV 774B)

As for the manner in which things are understood to be in the human mind, the Student appears to rely on the liberal arts. Drawing on geometry,<sup>104</sup> he gives an example from the Platonic tradition, stating that a triangle perceived in reality is but a sensible perception of the triangle that exists in the mind.<sup>105</sup> By this triangle existing in the mind he refers neither to a mental triangle that can be drawn in the imagination nor to the sensible triangle from which one can abstract, but to the eternal triangle that archetypically founds the art of geometry. It is in this same solidly-based way that all things are supposed to exist eternally in the soul.

However, although the Student has acknowledged that all things are created in man, this does not mean that he has established an unambiguous interpretation of Genesis' report on the creation of things. All creatures precede man, but at the same time they seem to be created all over again in man. Perhaps their first creation does not count? Or maybe man is not to be seen as an independent creature, but rather as a composite reflection of various things?<sup>106</sup> Approaching the problem from the perspective of the human substance, we should however phrase the question quite differently. The central problem that emerges in an anthropological context is: does man coincide with the created notions he contains in himself or is he a substance in addition to them, reflecting the complete universe within himself? I want to start my response by repeating the Master and the Student's previous conclusion that that which understands is at all times better than that which is understood. This resulted in a tentative closing statement about creation existing more truly in man

<sup>104</sup> For Eriugena's definition of geometry, see: *Per.* I 475A-B, Sh.-W.: 112: *Geometrica est planarum figurarum solidarumque spatia superficiesque sagaci mentis intuitu considerans disciplina; Per.* V 869B: *Non aliter* (Eriugena has stated that Arithmetic begins and ends with the principle of the Monad, in which all things originate and to which they all return) in *Geometria sentiendum; quae eadem ratione a principio sui, quod Graeci σημειον, Latini signum vocant, incipiens, per plana solidaque schemata, superficies, et latera, angulos quoque componens, longitudinis et latitudinis, profunditatis etiam spatia perficit. Quibus omnibus resolutis ad proprium sui principium, quod est signum, in quo tota virtus artis consistit, regreditur.*

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Plato, *Republic*, VI 509c-511a.

<sup>106</sup> Paraphrase of *Per.* IV 775C-776A.

than in itself. In their ensuing discussion they broadened the definition of the mind, discerning in it a triad that included the mind, its skill and its learning, and thereby also the liberal arts. With this in mind, the question concerning the logical order to which any process of knowledge should adhere, comes to focus ultimately on the problem whether man can at all be separated from his knowledge. It is only by answering this question deftly that the problem of man's factual ignorance can possibly be decided in favour of an unharmed rational nature.

In general the Student holds that, given the premises which were agreed upon earlier, the understanding mind is prior to its knowledge. Yet things that understand themselves (as man obviously does) can hardly be prior to themselves, for when knowledge and being are one, there can be no distinction of any temporal order. Therefore, the true substance of man is to be found in the concrete human existence as its ultimate reality. Reaching this anthropological view, based upon the reality of an existing and thinking human creature, we appear finally to hit upon what was the motivating and motive principle of Eriugena's thinking all along: the unity of ontology and intelligibility. The *Periphyseon* here claims that this unity has its origin in man, as it is in human existence that being and understanding naturally coincide. The Student phrases his opinion on this matter as follows:

S. For I know that I am, and yet my knowledge of myself does not precede me, because I and the knowledge by which I know myself are not separate things; and if I did not know that I was, I would still know that I did not know that I was: and therefore, whether or not I know that I am, I will not lack knowledge; for the knowledge of my ignorance will remain. And if everything which can know that it does not know itself, cannot thereby ignore the fact that it is - for if it were altogether not to be, it would not know that it did not know itself -: it follows that everything definitely is which either knows that it is or knows that it does not know that it is. But if anyone has fallen into such tremendous ignorance that he neither knows that he is nor senses that he does not know that he is, my judgement would be that he is either no man at all or that he has completely abandoned existence. (*Per.* IV 776B-C)

In drawing attention to this passage I do not want to emphasize the *cogito*-aspect discernible in it.<sup>107</sup> This has been given prominence before, and, to a certain extent, justifiably so.<sup>108</sup> But an explanation in terms of some sort of preconceived human consciousness cannot account for the crucial position this passage has in the context of the *Periphyseon*. My

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* IV.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Stock 1977.

specific aim, therefore, is to assign this passage its particular role within the evolution of *natura*. As such it seems to lay its greatest claim to importance within Eriugena's views as a whole.<sup>109</sup> Seen from this perspective, what Eriugena does here is not to be contemplated as establishing a modern concept of individuality. Rather, it appears that he starts from the opposite direction. It is in the uniqueness of man's concrete existence that he wants to find the ultimate justification of the unity of ontology and intelligibility, which has become the cornerstone of his epistemology. Thus, unlike a Cartesian *cogito*,<sup>110</sup> Eriugena is not attempting in any way to prove man's existence.<sup>111</sup> Man's being, in an essential as much as an existential sense, is an undeniable fact for him. So is, for that matter, man's knowledge also, for human nature has previously been defined as containing the concepts of all created things in itself. But the exceptional quality, which marks the human existence exclusively, is how knowing and being go hand in hand, to the point that they can no longer be effectively distinguished. In man they appear to have become completely interchangeable.

The consequences of this are enormous. In the first place, it means that man cannot go back behind his own being. Even if he professes sheer ignorance on the issue of knowing himself, he must still concede to a knowing that he is, because this is the definitive outcome of the above argument. But even more importantly, given the indistinguishableness of man's being and his knowledge of his being, this also means that man cannot go back behind the point of having at least a certain awareness of himself. However ignorant he may (pretend to) be as to a full-scale knowledge of his final nature, what Eriugena brings out here cannot be defined other than as a self-awareness of man. It is this pivotal human self-awareness – the ultimate point of reference for Eriugena's disclosure of *natura* – that must be determined as the mainstay of his whole investigation of nature.

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<sup>109</sup> In Book I we can also find an Eriugenian *cogito*, cf. *Per.* I 490B, Sh.-W.: 144. Yet in my view it serves an entirely different purpose here, as it deals with the actual method of knowing, without further metaphysical implications. The passage runs as follows: *N. Dum ergo dico, Intellego me esse, nonne in hoc uno verbo quod est Intellego tria significo a se inseparabilia? Nam et me esse, et posse intelligere me esse, et intelligere me esse demonstro. Num vides uno verbo et meam οὐσίαν meamque virtutem et actionem significari? Non enim intelligerem si non essem neque intelligerem si virtute intelligentiae carerem nec illa virtus in me silet sed in operationem intelligendi prorumpit.* However, the main difference between this and the *cogito* in Book IV appears to be that here Eriugena deals with man only indirectly, in dealing with the problem of how God can be known (cf. his exposition of the categories, apophatic and kataphatic theology), whereas in Book IV he deals with man explicitly. Thus man's role in Book IV is considerably more important, especially in his responsibility for the accomplishment of nature's return.

<sup>110</sup> For Descartes' links with the medieval tradition, esp. Augustine's use of the *cogito*, see Gilson 1967: 191-201.

<sup>111</sup> As Stock claims he is, see Stock 1977: 334.

It is in man that the connection between ontology and intelligibility has found a first and fundamental basis of expression. Only once he has taken account of its specific anthropological substratum can Eriugena apply it to the whole universe. In this passage he already intimates how it is going to be applied, as he states that man in fact receives being and knowledge indiscriminately. This holds true not only for man's position in the spatio-temporal world, but also for the higher level of the primordial causes. Thus he allows the indistinguishability of ontology and intelligibility to underlie the complete cosmos, however extensive it may be. But man's specific knowledge of the self (*notitia sui*) will still remain tied up with the world of outward manifestation, which, although it is not valued because of a particularly distinguished position, functions nevertheless as the most essential point of reference in Eriugena's anthropological argument. In consequence, as man's existence is found to lie at the heart of the universal concurrence of ontology and intelligibility, the tangible and complicated process of man's reasoning is brought to the fore as the forum where the course of all cosmological developments is actually decided. Man appears to be at the very heart of *natura*'s complete unfolding because of a specific capacity to think this development through, and thereby to determine nothing less than its ultimate fate.

But still there is this irrevocable breach in human nature, whose integrity has been utterly defiled by sin. Human sin lies at the root of man's ignorance, a judgement which both the Master and the Student state as an irrefutable fact. This holds true even despite the fact that in man's ignorance the negative effects of sin and the negative description of man seem to converge on account of his submission to negative theology:

M. Why then does not every man know himself, as soon as he has entered through generation into this world?

S. I would not hesitate to say that in this the punishment of [human] nature for its transgression is manifest. For had man not sinned, he would surely not have fallen into such a deep ignorance of himself. (*Per.* IV 777A-B)

Therefore, Eriugena in the end still has to leave room for the grace of Christ's Incarnation (*qui solus absque peccato natus est in mundo*),<sup>112</sup> as it is through Christ that the balance is once again restored. We should note, however, that there has been a marked change in the role of Christ, who against the background of a view in which man embodies the unity of ontology and intelligibility, is not just seen as the divine Son of God, but as an omniscient human being. Rather than a divine answer to human faults, Christ proves to be an 'antidote' to man's sinful nature by fully

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<sup>112</sup> *Per.* IV 777B.

exploiting man's own resources. In Christ man's nature has taken on the concrete form of a limitless capacity of knowing. In this manner Eriugena inaugurates a new beginning for mankind, in which the disastrous effects of sin are overcome not so much by the external infusion of grace but by an internal remedy in the form of intellectual insight.

S. But he himself, who alone was born in this world without sin, the world's Redeemer, never on any occasion suffered such ignorance. On the contrary, immediately upon his conception and his birth, he had understanding and could speak and teach regarding himself and all things, not only because he was the wisdom of the Father, from which nothing could be kept, but also because he had taken on untainted humanity so as to purge tainted humanity; not because he took on a different humanity from the one he restored, but because he alone had remained untainted in it, as he was stored away in the most secret reasons of nature to provide a remedy for the wound of injured nature. Human nature was completely wasted in all men, except in him alone, in whom it remained incorruptible. And he himself is the greatest example of grace, not because he was pardoned for any part of the human guilt, but because he alone of all without any preceding merits was joined into a unity of substance with the Word of God, in which all the elect, receivers of the fullness of his grace, become sons of God and participants in the divine substance. (*Per.* IV 777B-C)

Though the perfect humanity of Christ blends completely with his divinity, he is characterized mainly as a rational human instead of a divine being. The perfect knowledge that is his share seems due not to so much to divine wisdom as to a cleansed, i.e. unpolluted, human nature.

It is this aspect of Christ which the Master quite understandably wants to emphasize, by linking it directly to the original human state, of which Christ serves as a perfect example:

M. So there was in human nature, had it not sinned, the potential to have the most perfect knowledge of itself.

S. Nothing is closer to the truth. Indeed the fall of human nature was very great and most deplorable: to abandon the knowledge and wisdom that was implanted in itself and to fall into such a deep ignorance of itself and its Creator. Nevertheless the yearning for the lost beatitude is understood to have remained in human nature even after the fall, which would by no means have happened, if it had ignored itself and its God completely. (*Per.* IV 777C-D)

As can be seen in this passage, man's self-awareness is still far from a complete knowledge of the self, which has become impossible on account of sin. But the yearning for it is latently present in man's *appetitus beatitudinis*, which is at the same time his main incentive for striving to achieve the return to God. Eriugena wants to re-establish man's perfect nature by envisaging its adumbration in the perfect humanity of Christ. It is only in

such a perfected state that man can return to God and thus save *natura*, which in its deepest essence is found to exist truly in man.

M. If human nature contained a perfect knowledge of itself and its Creator before sin, will it surprise you if it is rationally understood that it had the fullest knowledge of natures similar to it, like the celestial essences, and inferior to it, like this world with its reasons which submit to the intellect, and that it still possesses this knowledge, hitherto only as a possibility but in reality in the highest men?

S. It will not be surprising, but true and likely for those with a clear intelligence. (*Per.* IV 778C)

The statement that in the saints a true sample of perfect human nature, which contains the knowledge of the universe within itself, is shining through, kindles the hope that a restoration of human nature may yet be effectively brought about.

For a brief period of time this makes the Master sing the praises of human nature. Then both he and his Student return to their original topic of comparing angelic and human nature. Yet in the course of explaining how angels and men relate to each other the Master unexpectedly makes an interesting point, providing us with a momentary insight into how Eriugena foresees the eschatological unity of God and man. Once again we hit upon the close affiliation of ontology and intelligibility, in which the fundamental link between man and nature consists. It is also the path along which the future reunion between God and nature will be eventually accomplished. Without further notice the argument then switches from the resemblance of human and angelic nature to the nature of the rational discussion the Master and his Student are themselves engaged in. In a moment of perfect *reditus*, so it seems, reason takes the required course by which the interchange of intellectual information can be immediately implemented in reality.

M. For he who, as I said, has clear understanding, is created in the object of his understanding. So the rational and intellectual nature of angels is created in the rational and intellectual nature of men, in the same way as human nature is created in angelic nature through a reciprocal knowledge by which an angel understands man and man an angel. And this should not surprise us. For this also applies to us: when we engage in a discussion, we are made in each other. For when I understand that you understand, I am made your understanding, and in an inexpressible way, I am created in you. In the same way, when you clearly understand what I plainly understand, then you are made my understanding, and two understandings are made one, formed by that which we both sincerely and unhesitatingly understand. To illustrate this, let us introduce an example based on numbers: you understand that the number six is equal in all its parts; and I understand this in the same way and I understand that you understand it, just as you under-

stand that I understand it. Our individual understandings become one, formed by the number six, and through this I am created in you and you are created in me. For we are not different from our understandings; but our truest and highest essence is the understanding specified by the contemplation of the truth. (*Per.* IV 780B-C)

Before the return of the cosmos can be achieved, man's integrity will have to be absolutely ascertained. Integrity, however, coincides with pure understanding and therefore it is necessary for Eriugena to embark on the process of return by showing the efficacy of man's reasoning. Only when man understands, can that which is understood or he who is understood come effectively into being.

But not only that. If someone is understood, then he appears in fact to be created by and in this understanding. It is here that the power attributed to human reason is hovering over the abyss of what would qualify as downright heresy, for reason here fully delegates the power of creation to itself. The rational investigation which Eriugena has undertaken in the *Periphyseon* thus gains a new, anthropological perspective, because in the light of what has now been established it can be explained as a dialectical attempt to prove and implement man's fitness for the return with God. Eriugena's cosmology, as described in the *Periphyseon*'s on-going dialogue, may be reduced to a mere figment of his mind, yet at the same time it is a necessary precondition for the salvation of the human soul, as it gives man the necessary opportunity to reason himself into the perfect position for a reunion with God.

Thus the rational search of a lost soul, who had abandoned God ever since the early days of paradise and ever since wanted to be reunited with his creator, and the return of an immense universe to its primordial causes and thereby to its distant creator, are ultimately one and the same process, in which man is the dominant principle. If, in the face of a complete unity of God and the world, all proportions seem to be entirely lost because of the magnetic attraction of the divine essence which touches the world with a theophanic spell, it is only the subtle clarity of human reasoning that can safely guide us through. In his eternal yearning for the God he lost, man can save creation only by taking it under his wings, i.e. by applying his own rational rules to it. In this state he sets out to reach the final end.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### BACK TO GOD. THE FINAL *REDITUS* OF MAN AND NATURE

#### 5.1. *The Three Anthropological Levels Interrelated*

In the previous chapter we distinguished various levels of Eriugena's anthropology. Using these levels as platforms on which to give cross-sections of increasing depth, we gradually penetrated into the very richness of the *Periphyseon*'s ideas, in which man is found surrounded by infinite nature. I opted for a fully-fledged presentation of Eriugena's anthropology on different levels rather than focusing on particular aspects of human nature, in order to represent man as an indissoluble part of the all-embracing movement of Eriugena's thought ranging over the procession and the return of *natura*. In this development of nature man appears to play a role of growing importance. Our final goal in unfolding Eriugena's anthropology in the above manner was more specifically to intensify the bonds between human nature and the issue of the *reditus* of the universe. After all, it is with the inauguration of the final theme of nature's return that Eriugena introduced the discussion of man. As he embarked on this discussion in Book IV of the *Periphyseon*, we noted that the breach that unbalances the integrity of human nature, i.e. man's act of sin, although it threatens the unfolding of *natura*, also enhances the immediate urgency of man's return. In this respect it appears that through sin, as if by a remarkable dialectical twist, we come to face what can perhaps be best described as the increasing actuality of man for the general return of nature.

Man's importance for the return of nature is seen to reach a first climax in the problem of his own return. If this is to be achieved Eriugena must give some sort of 'rationale' for the occurrence of sin. By means of an approach in which man gradually advances to the foreground of Eriugena's discussion, the various roles of man were integrated into the *Periphyseon*'s overall view of nature. Taking the problem of sin as my point of departure I have tried to give an evaluation of *natura*, in which I connected its various aspects in an increasingly direct manner to the creature of man. Let me enumerate the results so far.

On the first level man has been portrayed as the object of *natura*. We find universal nature confined here to the third form of created and uncreative nature, whose origin is described in the first chapter of Genesis. Within the bounds of Eriugena's *Hexaemeron* frame of reference man functions as the last creature to come into being as well as the only one that

becomes endowed with the epithet 'the image of God'. On this level Eriugena closely follows the biblical narrative, in which the problem of sin inaugurates man's tragic fall from the happiness he enjoyed in paradise. Sin can be explained in terms of man's disobedience in regard to God's commandment. With an argument adopted directly from Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena holds that the negative effects of sin are shown most markedly in the division of mankind into male and female, whereby a material body is 'superadded' to man's original spiritual body. This then compensates for man's loss of the angelic manner of propagation. By providing man with the alternative method of sexual procreation, God warrants that the whole of mankind can still come into being. Though severely punished, man is not deprived of all opportunities to be saved. However, clad with a perishable body, he cannot be eternally saved without the help of Christ, whose Incarnation cleanses mankind from the lasting effects of sin. What is more, Christ's Resurrection into an undivided state conquers the most extreme consequence to which all human sin must inevitably lead, i.e. death.

On this first level the return of man appears to be brought about by 'external' means, as it is dependent on Christ,<sup>1</sup> the Divine Word, who becomes born as a human being. Christ cleanses man from sin by setting a new example, which proves to be an effective means to purify defiled human nature. With the dominant role of Christ there corresponds the notion that the final return of man can only take place at the end of times, when the return of Christ will bring about the resurrection of all as spiritual men.<sup>2</sup> Those who are still living in their physical bodies upon Christ's return will be immediately transformed into a state of eternal life.<sup>3</sup> In this argument it appears that the dialectical principle underlying the movement of man's *processio* and *reditus* must ultimately be death itself, which is definitely the most damaging and disastrous effect of sin. But causing the end of man's life as a life in a degraded state, death also inaugurates the dissolution of man's physical body and thereby the long awaited end of his divided state. Thus death seems to count as a positive as well as a negative event in Eriugena's doctrine. This double-sidedness of human death, as a true dialectical principle, appears to be the pivotal point of Eriugena's anthropology on this first level.

From Eriugena's interpretation of Genesis on this level it can be

<sup>1</sup> *Per.* V 978D: *Tota itaque humanitas in ipso, qui eam totam assumpsit, in pristinum reversura est statum, in Verbo Dei videlicet incarnato.*

<sup>2</sup> Eriugena adopts the idea that man will not rise in a spiritual body, but rather as pure spirit, cf. *Per.* V 987B: *...non mutationem corporis terreni in caeleste corpus, sed omnino transitum in purum spiritum, non in illum, qui aether, sed in illum, qui intellectus vocitatur.*

<sup>3</sup> Compare Eriugena's exegesis of the Pauline saying '*Omnes quidem resurgemus, sed non omnes immutabimur*' (1 Cor.15:51), *Per.* V 979B-984B.

deduced that time is an important factor in the unrolling of the events involving man. At the same time, it is a factor with which the *Periphyseon* seems to tamper. This is apparent from Eriugena's interpretation of the effects of sin on mankind. In his view the division of mankind is seen as a direct consequence of sin, yet in Genesis it is clearly narrated as taking place before man's actual perpetration of sin. Eriugena disposes of the exegetical difficulty that emerges by claiming that God had in fact anticipated man's going astray, as he, in his foreknowledge of things, had created the effects of sin before the actual deed of sin was committed. As in his earlier work the *De divina praedestinatione*, Eriugena does not want to accept in the *Periphyseon* the guidance of a temporal order of events, to which God could in any way appear to be subjugated.<sup>4</sup> He thinks that the time sequence of Genesis is instituted more to comply with human needs than because it is in close correspondence with the divine order of events. For God, time is eternal and immutable. Therefore it is at all times actual. For man, however, it initiates an order of events which should definitely be heeded, as if marking precisely the shortcomings and deficiencies of the human species. This is ultimately why man has to await the end of times before he can be restored to his original state. Only when the element of time has been forever dispensed with, will man be able to resume his true nature as *imago dei*.

If we uphold this view, which I think indeed we should, the question whether Eriugena has ever deemed it possible that, within the boundaries of time, man could effectively be the image of God at all looms large. The realization of man's character as *imago dei* seems rather a lost cause from the very beginning. This then would make the description of Genesis a lofty ideal to be emulated rather than the precise account of man's former state of being.<sup>5</sup> However, this is not to undermine Eriugena's adherence to the appropriateness of man's typification as a divine image. The fact of man's biblical portrayal as such convinces Eriugena of its adequacy more than any traceable historical origin would ever do.

Since it would thus seem that man's true character has never been realized, this throws new light on the radical impact of sin in Genesis. Rather than pointing to man's state of lapsation from a previous condition, man's sinful state cannot be distinguished from his original state, in which he was created on earth. If this is indeed true, the return of man would entail

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<sup>4</sup> The argument in the *De praed.* appears to be partly based on the premise that God's knowledge cannot be 'measured' in any way, ch. 9 (*De eo quod non proprie sed temporalium rerum similitudine praedicantur de deo praescientia et praedestinatione*).

<sup>5</sup> *Per.* IV 809B: *Proinde plus, ut arbitror, laus illa vitae hominis in paradiso referenda est ad futurum ejus vitam, si obediens permaneret, quam ad peractam, quae solummodo inchoaverat, nec unquam steterat.* Cf. Grimm 1977: 114-115.

a striving for a cause higher than the straightforward restoration to the state in which he was first created.<sup>6</sup> For his original state seems to have borne the marks of his tragic fall all along. The seriousness of sin would thus appear to be nothing other than the seriousness of man's earthly, diffuse existence, from which Eriugena, as a true Christian-Neoplatonic thinker, seems only to want to escape. But, in the *Periphyseon*, unlike in Neoplatonism, man's earthly existence *per se* is less likely to become a negative issue because it is seen above all as the natural consequence of man's created nature, which contains within itself the potential for achieving a higher state of being.<sup>7</sup> Yet it still seems that this higher, for more complete state of being, cannot be realized within the limited stretch of a temporal life. It is only after death, or rather at the end of time that man's return to a full life can be envisioned.

Notwithstanding the fact that the realization of man's perfect happiness seems to fall outside the scope of time, attention should still be paid to the time-sequence of Genesis. Eriugena seems to hold that it serves a predominantly pedagogical purpose, inasmuch as it complies with the shortcomings of man's mental structure. For God there may not be a temporal order of events, but for man there is. This reminds us of Eriugena's earlier justification in Book II of the four forms of nature, which in much the same way were tailored towards human understanding rather than tracing the steps of the divine. As we determined them to be of an intrinsically dialectical nature, so in my view the temporal order of events can be seen to reflect a similar dialectical intention. Its precise nature will become gradually clear as Eriugena unfolds his exegetical exposition. On this first level, Eriugena on the whole still respects the time-sequence for the sake of enhancing human understanding, although for God it admittedly plays no role of importance. For God all things take place at the same time. For God, therefore, man's creation and his fall happen concurrently.

On this basis Eriugena can successfully defend the position that God wanted to anticipate sin by creating the effects of sin, i.e. the division of mankind, before man actually transgressed. However, there is still some sort of distinction between the events before and after sin, in so far as it

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<sup>6</sup> See *Per.* V 1012C-1015A. In *Per.* V 1014B Eriugena says: *Ad hunc itaque statum primorum hominum ante delictum, hoc est, ad sola naturalia bona absque virtutum ornamentis,...*

<sup>7</sup> In the (Neo)platonistic tradition the depreciation of the bodily existence varies with the appreciation of the divine character of the soul, the awareness of which stimulates man either to exercise control over the body or to escape from it altogether. Although similar views definitely persist in early Christianity (cf. Gregory of Nyssa's view that only the *voûç* bears God's image), it should be noted that the breach between the sensible and the intelligible world is far less radical, as the whole of man is created in the reflection of God. For an overview of the development of Neoplatonic thought, see Armstrong 1967: Part III: Plotinus, 195-268; Part IV: The Later Neoplatonists, 272-325.

must be made clear that God did not purposely create man as a sinful creature. Man was said to be created with a free will and thus he committed sin entirely of his own accord, induced to such wrongdoing by his own selfish pride. There still is the underlying notion that one thing must logically precede the other, although God oversees all events in one glance. But the order, according to which Genesis narrates the creation of man and his division into male and female before it actually narrates the act of sin itself, is nothing more than a captivating literary device, which must completely lose significance before the eternal face of God.

On the second level of our interpretation of Eriugena's anthropology we are confronted with an allegorization of the events in paradise leading finally to man's expulsion from the original scene of his happiness. I have tried to determine the consequences of Eriugena's use of allegory for the interpretation of Genesis and the temporal sequence of its happenings, inasmuch as they affect the portrayal of the role of man (i.e. his procession and return within the boundaries of *natura*). We found that on the second level of interpretation paradise was generally identified with human nature. This must have grave consequences for the interpretation of sin, as the chronological order of events, i.e. a state of happiness succeeded by an absolute downfall, becomes transformed into an (onto)logical diffusion of perfection and corruption.

Moreover, in this view all events of nature seem to take place within the same human *persona*. For the interpretation of the story of paradise this comes to mean the following. Adam in the paradise narrative represents man's rational character (νοῦς), whereas Eve stands for the senses (αἰσθησις). Man's fall signifies the conquest of reason by the senses. This initiates a grave disturbance of the intended hierarchy of creation. After all, it was through reason that man was able to distinguish himself as the true *imago dei*, -a claim which Eriugena had adopted directly from Gregory of Nyssa. The expulsion from paradise signifies the radical disturbance of man's original balance, as reason was supposed to exercise perfect control over man's sensory faculties. On this allegorical level the negative effect of sin seems to point to a fate that is far more serious than that of the first level. Not only has reason been successfully challenged by the lower, i.e. sensory faculties, to the extent that it has lost its governing power but also, as a result of this, the integrity of man's reasoning itself is at risk.

Through the allegorization of paradise as *humana natura* Eriugena has little difficulty in disposing completely of the temporal structure of the Genesis events. However, he still entertains a strongly dynamic view of human nature, which now becomes presented as the conflict between man's perfect state and his corrupted state. But the tension detected here is explicitly confined to the limited scene of the human *persona*. To

preserve and represent the dynamism by which human nature is connected with universal nature, Eriugena has recourse to a new anthropological view. Claiming to follow St. Paul, he comes to divide human nature into an exterior and an interior man (cf. 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:22-24). Rather than relying on the information of Genesis itself, as was the case with the external division of man into male and female, he takes this view as his new point of departure in explaining Genesis. It centres around the radical distinction between man's rational i.e. *imago*-character and his sensory perception. The most daring consequence of this is that man's inclination to evil becomes interpreted as a *motus extra naturam*,<sup>8</sup> which ultimately implies that it is altogether foreign to man's intrinsic rational character. While this does not completely deprive man of his responsibility, it nevertheless goes far to save the underlying consistency of his rational character, since it evokes an atmosphere of unchallenged integrity.

This has remarkable consequences for the process of man's return. As it is in man's rational character that we can find the true image of God, so it must be through a rational act of man, as exemplified in rational exegesis, that Eriugena will interpret Genesis in order to evaluate the true position of man. Since there is no historical point of reference for man's becoming a sinful creature, there is also no visible transition which marks the end of his sinful state and the beginning of his return. There is only reason which steers its independent, but (as Eriugena claims since it reflects the divine) ultimately God-given course towards the complete rehabilitation of man.

The effects of this outspoken rational stand on Eriugena's allegorical exegesis are manifold. We have noticed how Eriugena feels justified in taking extreme liberties as he completely abandons the temporal structure of Genesis. With a view of paradise as completely identified with human nature, all occurrences in paradise are seen to pertain to various aspects of man's internal structure, rather than indicating any sort of chronological order. Therefore, Eriugena can feel completely at ease, showing not the slightest hesitation as he overthrows the narrative along with the temporal order of Genesis. This is not to imply a lack of refined precision on his part, since biblical authority will remain something that must at all times be reckoned with. Rather, it induces him to elaborate cautiously on his own assumed rational order of events, through which he intends to clarify the biblical narrative rather than undermine it. In setting out to achieve this goal, he operates with a meticulous precision which becomes most markedly clear when his interpretation of Genesis results in what is the exact reversal of the biblical order of events. To illustrate this he

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<sup>8</sup> *Per.* IV 828D.

reveals in Genesis the use of the rhetorical device of *prolepsis* or ὑστερον πρότερον.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, Eriugena adroitly discards another obstacle that arises when the effective consequences of man's fall have all become located within the confines of man's paradisaical nature. By transferring certain events that supposedly took place within paradise, i.e. *humana natura*, to the region outside paradise, he reduces them to a role of merely marginal importance, so that they cannot harm man's intrinsic structure directly. Thus Eriugena can easily dispense with various elements of the Genesis story that seem not to comply with his views,<sup>10</sup> such as Adam's sleep, the creation of the woman, and ultimately perhaps even the act of sin itself.

By abandoning the narrative structure of Genesis, with its details of time and place, Eriugena abandons the distinction between man before and after sin. Instead he discriminates between what he calls man's interior and his exterior character. The effect of this is that Eriugena is free to connect the aspects of man's perfection and his corruption with his rational and irrational nature, in exact accordance with his own rational standards. As these derive from man's *imago*-character in the first place, they cannot fundamentally lead him astray. Sin affects the outer (i.e. the sensory) man rather than his inner, rational nature.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately this inspires Eriugena to a sense of optimism. He makes it clear that the outcome of his exegesis of Genesis, leading to the expulsion of man from paradise, cannot be entirely negative. Guided and propelled by reason as he intends it to be, it must ultimately lead to the full reinstatement of rational man.

We further should point out the final vision of the return, that is brought about by this exegetical procedure. Since Eriugena is interested in saving the integrity of *humana natura*, which is indissolubly connected with man's rationality as the hallmark of his *imago*-character, it is of prime importance to take the blame away from man so as to guarantee the possibility of his return to God. Towards the end of the *Periphyseon*'s fourth book we find Eriugena tending in that direction. Here we come across some of his own most original exegetical interpretations. These are still allegorical, but as they are not derived from Ambrose or Gregory of Nyssa or Maximus the Confessor as their direct source, they appear to

<sup>9</sup> See *Per.* IV 837A-B.

<sup>10</sup> See *Per.* IV 837A: *Haec igitur, ut praediximus, quae post soporem immissum in Adam divina narrat Scriptura, quamvis in paradiso veluti facta legantur, rationabilius tamen, et veritati congruentius, post peccatum, ac per hoc extra paradysum humanae naturae merito inobedientiae superaddita credenda et intelligenda sunt.*

<sup>11</sup> Evil arises through *falsitas*, which occurs when the exterior sense transmits false information, thus misleading the interior sense. This mistake is transmitted upwards until it affects reason and intellect. (N.B. The interior and exterior sense are found in the middle of human nature, as the two trees planted in the middle of paradise.)

have a more direct connection to the rationale of Eriugena's arguments. A significant passage towards the end of Book IV deals with the interpretation of man's expulsion from paradise. At this point especially we can see how Eriugena wants to leave all things open, as it is beyond doubt that man's definite removal from paradise would imply that he was completely out of touch with his inner nature. We can see Eriugena constructing what he considers would make the strongest case for man's defence in terms of rational soundness. Man should not try to deny all his guilt, but rather integrate it through accepting his responsibility:

Such a removal of the crime does not form a case for your defence, but rather adds to the heap of condemnation. (*Per.* IV 846D)

If, as is proposed here, man can indeed be persuaded into accepting his own guilt, he will then perhaps also be ready to reach for a new and better awareness of self, in which he should try to reunite reason and sense-perception into one undivided being.

It is this view of human nature, in which there is an invisible balance between the inner and the outer man, i.e. reason and the senses, that provides the starting-point for man's return to God and, through man, for the return of nature as a whole. In the acceptance of his sinful being, which as yet lacks direct contemplation, but firmly relies on the resilience of the rational mind, dependent on information brought in by the senses, Eriugena has taken the first step in bringing man back to God. Accordingly, Genesis' narration of man's expulsion from paradise can be explained as a movement leading us toward God rather than drawing us away from him.<sup>12</sup> All the curses brought upon the first inhabitants of paradise reflect God's mercy and not his revenge, so Eriugena's claims. The labour the woman will have to endure when giving birth is allegorized as the painstaking process of human ratiocination, which must be seen as consciously intended by God to thrust man in the direction of return rather than turning him away from himself. It seems to be suggested at the realization of the final return that man will acquire an immediate perception of things, as was ideally intended by God. On account of the simultaneity of the events in paradise it had never been put into effect.

On this second level of anthropological interpretation the return of man is clearly foreshadowed by the richness of the simple expression *terra*, through the use of which the beginning of Book IV reveals a remarkable correspondence with its ending.<sup>13</sup> Here, at the end of Book IV it repre-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Per.* V 862C-D: *Ait enim [sc. divina clementia]: Ne forte manum suam mittat, et sumat de ligno vitae, et comedat, et vivat in aeternum [Gen.3:22]. Tanquam diceret: Non adeo de interitu hominis dolendum lapsuque ipsius de paradiso lugendum; non enim spes redeundi ab illo penitus ablata est.*

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Per.* IV 744B-C ff. with *Per.* IV 857B ff.



sents the earth from which man is taken and to which he will therefore return. Eriugena interprets *terra* as the sum of all primordial causes, to which man will return after the dissolution of his physical body. As we are dealing here with an allegorical level of exegesis, there is no more thought of a future assembly of the four elements leading to the constitution of a new spiritual body, which will rise at the end of times. Instead the return on the allegorical level is a return from the outer to the inner man, i.e. from man's outward manifestation in spatio-temporal creation to his inner state of rationality on the eternal level of the intelligible primordial causes. As man is brought back to the primordial causes, so in his train is all of nature. From there it is to God himself as *natura non creans et non creata*, that Eriugena wants eventually to return.

On the third and most far-reaching level of anthropological interpretation, where man seems to have taken over the scene of nature's action, we find Eriugena asserting man's position as one among the many primordial causes. If this assertion can be justified, it would mean a step in the direction of man's final return, for the multitude of primordial causes is firmly rooted in the Divine Word, which was the first created and creative effect of God as *natura creans et non creata*. The incentive for broaching the issue of man as a primordial cause is ultimately to be found in Eriugena's view that man is not only the image of God, but that in him all created things can be effectively understood.<sup>14</sup> Thus human nature is seen as an intelligible representation of the universe. If all things are indeed to be found in man, his intelligible representation of created nature in consequence will hold a position of higher dignity than the universe's material manifestation itself.<sup>15</sup> We would then be able to reduce the entire created world to human proportions. In order to ascertain that man is a primordial cause, however, it is necessary to determine how all created things can be found in man, i.e. whether they are really created in man, when they appear to be rationally understood in him. In the string of questions thus set in motion, we find the recurrent theme of the relationship between ontology and intelligibility underlying the surface of the text. Although their connection had already been established, the nature of their origin has not yet been traced. As he is about to accomplish nature's return, Eriugena cannot afford to leave anything unsaid, because the achievement of the final *reditus* of man, and thus the fate of all of nature depends on it.

The discussion now following in the *Periphyseon* pivots around the position and the function of the human mind; whether things are actually in it, if they are said to be understood by it. This then leads to a further dis-

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Per.* IV 755B.

<sup>15</sup> See *Per.* IV 766B: *Quod enim intelligit, melius esse, quam quod intelligitur, ratio edocet.*

cussion of the mind and its qualities, which leads the Master and his Student to the establishment of a mental trinity, consisting of the mind, its skill and its learning. Through this triadic structure the human mind is able to understand itself, although it clearly cannot define itself. The only essential definition of the mind is given by its proclaimed existence in the divine mind. Thus the Master states irrevocably:

Thus we can give the following definition of man: Man is a certain intellectual notion, eternally made in the divine mind. (*Per.* IV 768B)

Man appears to be contained in the divine mind, as one of its numerous and impenetrable thoughts, which Eriugena generally refers to as the primordial causes. Though not completely clear yet, this situation seems to open up incredible opportunities for the human mind, which appears to find its eternal foundation in the bosom of the divine essence. Thus it can no longer be shaken by the trials and tribulations of a material, corruptible life in a spatio-temporal world. However, this definition does not fully exhaust the possibilities of the human mind. As is the case with every true definition, this definition establishes of man only that he is, without giving any particulars as to what he is. Not even by being firmly rooted in an infinite mind, which in every possible way can transcend its finite scope, does the human mind allow itself to be closed in.

However, Eriugena makes the definition of man as a notion in the divine mind remarkably effective when he subsequently combines it with the damaging effect of sin. As Eriugena has repeatedly made clear, human nature is affected by sin even in its most refined and dignified state. Made in the image of God, man is not only an eternal idea in the divine mind, but he also contains in his own mind all the images and notions of created things. Yet as a result of sin, man's knowledge, which is supposedly eternal and immutable, since these are the predicates of true wisdom, has been hidden from him. At this point Eriugena faces what appears to be the greatest risk for the ultimate salvation of creation. If every created thing must be ultimately reduced to its position in the human mind, whereupon the human mind will have to be reduced to an everlasting idea in the divine mind, and man's ideal or intelligible position is at the same time declared to be his true substance, then the implication of human sin, in the form of the inaccuracy of his knowledge, will be the effective annihilation of created existence. The ties between ontology and intelligibility, the origin of the existence of which had not yet been entirely clarified, thus turn out to be completely dependent on the effectiveness of man's rational investigation, in which the universe's very existence is at risk. Only when this investigation is properly, i.e. rationally, carried out, can the

intelligibility of creation, and thus its existence, be sufficiently warranted.

The final obstacle in the way of a straightforward and clear parallelism between the ideas in the divine mind, of which man appears to be one, and the ideas in the human mind, emerges when the above definition of man is confronted with his knowledge of self. Man has been defined as an eternal primordial cause. According to the accepted tenet that the actual notion of man in the divine mind is greater than the object that is understood, i.e. his being,<sup>16</sup> this definition can be taken as delineating man's true substance. Yet since man contains the notions of all things within himself, he also contains a knowledge of self within his own mind, which would make human self-knowledge the essence of his being. Thus one true definition meets with another, which leaves Eriugena to decide the matter in a final evaluation of man.

It is this final and most profound analysis of man that must provide us with the key to the problem of understanding man's position in the immediate context of created nature. By doing so it will also give the most definite answer to the problem of the being of all created things. Since their being ultimately coincides with their being created, it seems we can safely say that this focusing on man's self-knowledge in the broader context of the return of created nature to God will ultimately give us the answer to the problem of man's quest for God as the final object of his rational investigation. It is with God as the all-embracing entity that the unfolding of *natura* began, and it is with God as the final goal to which all things are under way, that the development of *natura* must end. But it is through man as the instance conditioning Eriugena's rational investigation that all movement must pass. Although this can by no means have the effect of making man the dominant influence in Eriugena's concept of *natura*, for *natura* by far transcends the boundaries of man -as it was said to exceed even the inexpressible limits of the divine- it nevertheless makes man the centre of Eriugena's rational investigation of nature. God and nature are ultimately rational (i.e. dialectical) beings in much the same way, but only man is able to, or after sin we should perhaps say doomed to, reflect on his position in a struggling attempt to come to terms with his loss of immediate contemplation.

Many questions remain to be asked. It is not entirely clear that they can all be answered. One of the most important problems is undoubtedly how to interpret man's loss of immediate contemplation and its substitution by a slowly progressing process of rational investigation. Does this turn the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Per.* IV 766B: *Nam si rerum omnium cognitio in divina sapientia subsistit, meliorem esse incomparabiliter eam rebus omnibus, quarum cognitio est, non temere pronuntiarim.*

whole inquiry that forms the underlying structure of the *Periphyseon* into a needless analysis, since it is ultimately based on man's corrupted state? If so, this would not only make the enterprise superfluous in retrospect, but it would lead to no other goal than revealing once again that man has failed to do what he had been originally created for, i.e. to supervise creation, to replace God on earth.<sup>17</sup> Another question presenting itself to us concerns the effectiveness of man's rationality. If the execution of a rational investigation should ultimately be regarded as the outcome of a negative development (i.e. man's sliding into self-inflated pride), it also involves his turning away from a position in which he was completely subjugated to the divine will and thus leaves him without any obvious sense of direction. If sin turns out to have the undermining effect we have suspected all along it would have, man should nevertheless gain freedom by being at last able to set out his own path. But the efficacy of his independently-designed investigation stands in danger of being seriously invalidated, when it avoids taking account of man's created dependence of God.

The problems sketched in the above can in effect be reduced to one basic dilemma pervading all aspects of the *Periphyseon*'s rich dialectical structure. We seem to be dealing here with the conflict between man's complete and perfect nature on the one hand, and his sinful and imperfect realization of this nature on the other. This translates into the terms of the *Periphyseon* as follows. Man was created with the innate capacity to carry out a process of rational thinking based upon a correct and fully controlled use of the senses and ultimately leading up to his final and immediate vision of the causes of things. In consequence of sin, however, he has lost his unfailing power of rational insight. Instead he now has to struggle with the imperfect data of the senses in a dialectical attempt to deduce a correct rational argument from them. Moreover, this reasoning process will never lead to the immediate contemplation that would have been the inevitable result of man's self-evident use of rational powers before he perpetrated the act of sin. Eriugena's extensive application and almost apologetic defence of theophany clearly illustrates this.

However, it must be granted that Eriugena's dialectical arguments would never have come into being, had man not sinned. Thus Eriugena would have to admit that the *Periphyseon*'s rational investigation, which in one way or another ought to be linked to man's reason or intellect and thus bears some sort of relation to his *imago*-character as the source of his justified pride, actually does not befit man. Apart from the success of perhaps the explicitly instructive and pedagogical parts of the *Periphyseon*, such as the exposition on the categories, the explication of affirmative and nega-

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<sup>17</sup> *Per.* IV 768D-769A.

tive theology, and the detailed exegesis of the first five days of Genesis 1, this means that Eriugena would have to live with final disappointment as to the ultimate purpose of his work, i.e. the accomplishment of *natura*'s final return to God.

Since man is the reflective subject of the *Periphyseon* and in this capacity he must be the guiding, albeit not necessarily the leading, principle of the rational investigation Eriugena has set out to apply to *natura*, it is ultimately the reflection of man on himself that can bring the answer to the question of reason's effectiveness. After man has disturbed his original balance by placing himself (i.e. his own pride) before God, to what extent is man's reason still capable of functioning effectively? As has been stated above, this dilemma is brought out in the text when one definition of man obviously clashes with another, while each seems to stand absolutely in its own right, since they are both the outcome of sound reasoning drawing on acceptable premises. What is interesting about these contradictory viewpoints on man is not so much the point of their disagreement, but rather the fact that Eriugena seems forced to take them both into serious consideration. Whereas at other places in the *Periphyseon* he may be justifiably accused of ignoring the real issues for the sake of making his point,<sup>18</sup> we can in this instance not rebuke him for any unlawful strategic moves from which his argument could too obviously benefit. For we are dealing here with two 'essential' definitions of man, as opposed to mere interchangeable opinions. By nature, definitions locate a thing's place, as they surround that which is defined, thereby encompassing it. In the one definition Eriugena defines man as an eternal notion in the divine mind, thus radically upgrading his earthly, created existence by locating it on the level of the primordial causes, whereby he enjoys an eternal life. In the other definition man appears to coincide with the notion he has in his mind of his own self, for just as God contains the notions of all (created) things including man in his divine mind, so man contains the notions of all created things in his human mind, including the notion he has of his own self.

The problem arising here is not just the rational contrast these definitions represent, for we will shortly see how Eriugena manages shrewdly to do away with that. The ultimate problem is that these definitions both make valid claims to establishing man's true substance. As a result of Eriugena's commitment to the parallel development of ontology and intelligibility, the 'essential' definition of man must determine what is his true substance. Since it is clear that there can only be one human substance, there cannot be two contradictory definitions. It is with this problem that

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. the discussion of man as an animal being opposed to man as the image of God at the beginning of *Per.* IV. (See above ch. 4.1.)

Eriugena has to come to terms. His approach is remarkable in the sense that he does not attempt to contest the parameters of each definition -we have extensively stated how they each stand in their own right- but opts for a final reflection on the process of man's reflection. In my view it is here that we come across the major turning-point in Eriugena's reasoning, indicating the incredible depth of his thinking. Up to this point Eriugena's arguments, as if drawing us into a tunnel from which there was no apparent way out, were all leading man towards a confession of his sins. After it, however, the horizon seems to broaden, in the dawning perspective of God's outstretched infinity.

### 5.2. *The Return of Nature through Man*

In the final part of the preceding chapter we gave an outline of how Eriugena reflects on the problem of man's self-knowledge. We should now briefly summarize his major arguments, trying to link them with the theme of *reditus* which, ever since the very beginning of Book IV, has formed his ultimate frame of reference.

Returning to the problem of two apparently conflicting definitions of man, I have pointed out that this by no means leads Eriugena to believe that the assumption of two substances of man is necessary. Although for Eriugena a thing's ontological existence is the result of its intelligible character,<sup>19</sup> this cannot simply be inverted so as to claim that various accounts of intelligible positions would automatically lead to the assumption of various substances. Rather, we will see him proceed in a completely different manner, as he distinguishes between various conceptual representations of man, through which he touches on man's ultimate roots in the reality of being only indirectly.

Eriugena defines man in the first place as a primordial cause, ranking him with the ensemble of all intelligible causes, which are found together in the Divine Word. This corresponds to the definition by which man is declared to be an eternal notion in the divine mind. Explaining this divine perspective on what seems to be one human substance, Eriugena states that what we are offered by this definition is in fact an insight into God's Word instead of into the thing itself. For Eriugena the final substance of a thing is not found in its capacity as a cause, although this clearly presents a loftier outlook on things, but rather by its existing in itself, i.e. as an effect.<sup>20</sup> Thus the level of the *natura creata et non creans* seems to gain in onto-

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the prologue to the *Per.* where *natura* is established by making the totality of *quae sunt et quae non sunt* depend on whether or not things can be rationally understood, *Per.* I 441A, Sh.-W.: 36.

<sup>20</sup> *Per.* IV 771A: *Aliter enim humana substantia per conditionem in intellectualibus perspicitur*

logical poise, while losing in intellectual profundity. No matter what shortcomings created reality may display when placed in a material, spatio-temporal world, it is ultimately not the immutability of the primordial causes, but rather the accidents of a thing such as its quality and quantity, that eventually yield human understanding.<sup>21</sup>

This unforeseen appreciation on Eriugena's part for things material, created and therefore finally only indirectly intelligible, appears to cause a break in his ordinary view of a dialectical nature, which seemed to be organized in a fairly strict and hierarchical way. Ordinarily, uncreated, immaterial and intelligible nature must be ranked above created nature, since it precedes the latter as its cause. However, although causes are indeed of a higher nature, they fall short in the sense that the pure intelligibility of the causes prevents their being understood, so that they escape the grasp of human, i.e. defective, reason and intellect. Thus the higher understanding to which knowledge of the causes would lead appears on the one hand not to be to Eriugena's purpose, inasmuch as he wants to grasp the reality of things,<sup>22</sup> while on the other hand it cannot be a feasible goal, since the demands of such a knowledge exceed man's rational capacities. This, in consequence, leaves us with the things themselves as the true objects of study, in their rather underrated capacity as mere effects of certain causes. We must see how this affects the study of human nature.

At first Eriugena does not immediately follow up the sudden appreciation shown for the effects of creation. Once again he seems to want to point out the dual nature of man, of which both knowledge and ignorance form inseparable parts. This brings us back to a familiar theme we have dealt with before, i.e. the issue of negative theology which was applied to man as well as God, man being created in the image of God. Just as Eriugena has applied it to God before, so he applies it to man; man can know that he is, yet he cannot know what he is.<sup>23</sup> However, at this final stage of our analysis this familiar point is not what should interest us most. The striking step Eriugena here takes is that he chooses not to pursue the matter of negative theology extensively, which would be his likely choice under the usual circumstances by which causes are found to excel over and above

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*causis, aliter per generationem in effectibus. Ibi quidem omni mutabilitate libera, hic mutabilitati obnoxia; ibi simplex omnibusque accidentibus absoluta omnem effugit contuitum et intellectum, hic compositionem quandam ex quantitativis et qualitativis, ceterisque, quae circa eam intelliguntur, accipit, per quam mentis recipit intuitum.*

<sup>21</sup> See also *Per. IV 772B*: *Definitur autem [sc. creatura] per suas circumstantias, quae sibi accedunt, in speciem propriam per generationem seu intelligibilem seu sensibilem proveniens.*

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Allard 1982.

<sup>23</sup> *Per. IV 771C-D*: *Apertissime ergo divina similitudo in humana mente dignoscitur, dum solummodo esse scitur; quid autem est, nescitur; et, ut ita dicam, negatur in ea quid esse, affirmatur solummodo esse.*

their effects. Since man has sinned and cannot exonerate himself from sin by acting entirely of his own accord, sin has struck severe and effective blows to human knowledge. The sin of man, because it is based on the unchallenged premise of his free will, must lead to the ignorance of man's condemnation, which cannot be construed easily to man's benefit. For there appears to be no effective means whereby man's ignorance arising from his transcendence of the boundaries of finite knowledge, can be distinguished in any way from the ignorance which is indicative of the loss of the knowledge he was entitled to and was intended to have at his disposal. Therefore, for Eriugena the negative road is cut off, as it can never be entirely clear with what kind of ignorance we are dealing. If we subsequently find Eriugena applying a different approach to the problem of human self-knowledge, this should primarily be interpreted as Eriugena's ultimate conclusion regarding the effects of human sin on the accuracy of man's rational faculties.

Therefore, we find the Master and his Student about to develop a new approach, which does not rely on man's natural affinity with God for its starting-point, although this point is never purposely suppressed in their discussion. Their focus of interest seems to have shifted from the divine perspective on man to the stature of man himself, who is ranked in nature as a created effect. In the debate that ensues the Master and his Student, who are once again discussing the difference between man and the angels,<sup>24</sup> underline the peculiarities of man's thinking process, as he toils and labours with the sense-data from which the mind has to abstract its information, unable as he is after sin to fall back on any sort of immediate insight. In addition to the idea that man is the image of the divine, we also find the notion that man is to a great extent also the image of creation, as all created things seem to be understood in man .... *verum etiam universitatem conditam in homine factam* (*Per.* IV 774B). Eriugena draws on the liberal arts to clarify the way in which things should be understood in man. But the same problem we have noticed before must inevitably arise, i.e. how the knowledge of all created things in the human soul relates to their substance. Intelligibility in Eriugena has as a matter of course ontological connotations.<sup>25</sup> Yet the precise relationship between the two has still not been unshakeably established.

The fact that all things can be understood in the creature of man evokes the question of the status of this intelligence in man, for one way or

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<sup>24</sup> *Per.* IV 772B ff.

<sup>25</sup> *Per.* IV 774A: *Quapropter et res, quarum notitiae humanae naturae insunt, in suis notionibus subsistere non incongrue intelliguntur. Ubi enim melius cognitionem suam patiuntur, ibi verius existere judicandae sunt.*



another the presence of the whole of creation in the human mind seems to be implied. However, this still does not solve the problem of man's knowledge of himself. We have previously encountered the problem that man could not understand himself as the image of God, since he had lost his sense of immediate contemplation on account of sin. Turning away from man's Godlike quality, we seem to run into a different yet equally difficult set of problems when taking recourse in the notion of man's natural affinity with the totality of created nature. The problem here is not man's falling short of his Godlike essence, as on account of sin he could not live up to his being the image of God, but rather the imminent danger that human nature itself threatens to disappear. By telescoping the levels of creation into the one creature of man, the unity of *humana natura* seems to become exhaustively replaced by scattered fragments of created nature. In both cases, there ultimately looms one and the same danger, i.e. the destruction of the human character as an intellectual substance with a separate identity. Man cannot be reduced to a role of merely representing the image of God on earth, because he did not and will never manage to live up to this ideal. On the other hand, we will shortly see how Eriugena takes great pains to make clear that man can also not be seen as a mere sum of all the different parts of creation.

It is man's own identity for which Eriugena is searching in the passages to be discussed. Before focusing on these, however, it is of fundamental importance to make clear that whatever result may come from his investigation, the status of human nature that is under discussion here is not to be interpreted as it would be if we were dealing with a modern, i.e. post-Cartesian, notion of independently-acting personal human beings.<sup>26</sup> What we find here is a view in which human nature is fully integrated with the rest of created nature, but at the same time still stands apart from it, since it is able to reflect on its own origin and its future purpose. It is in this sense of reflection that human nature can also explore the ground for the complete universe. By considering its future purpose, it can set out the lines for the on-going development of creation, which will collectively follow the course of man. Thus ultimately it appears that man's reflection on his own nature must give direction to Eriugena's infinite universe as a whole, because it foreshadows the future *reditus*.

It has been pointed out many times above that in the *Periphyseon* the various elements of the universe refer to each other for the final grounding of their reality. The being of a thing refers to its intelligible status, whereas

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* IV. As Descartes seems to use his principle of *cogito ergo sum* to overcome the doubts of the sceptics, he seems to reveal a closer unity with Augustine, who uses a similar argument, than with Eriugena. For Augustine's *cogito*: see *De civ. dei*. XI 26 (*Si enim fallor, sum*).

non-being indicates its transcendence of (human) understanding. In a different manner creative nature and created nature seem to stand in a dialectical relation to each other, which in the complicated Eriugenian representation of things cannot be explained simply by identifying them as subject and object or even, for that matter, cause and effect.<sup>27</sup> When we look at the infinite universe portrayed in the *Periphyseon*'s most majestic terms, we find that its coherence lies in its theophanic character,<sup>28</sup> which unifies creator and creation in an indissoluble bond. This makes it rather difficult to perceive, let alone penetrate the *Periphyseon*'s structure, for as a result of the universe's dovetailed structure, none of its elements can be taken at face-value. Eriugena's unwavering conviction of the central importance of human nature (as it was human rational thinking that first inspired a sense for the infinity of the universe), directs him again to man for the ultimate foundation and interpretation of the universe. If, in consequence of Eriugena's careful procedure to reduce all aspects of this universe to man, we are thrown back on the resources of human nature, the direct effects of sin mean that we have to toil and labour in a strenuous reflection process before rising to the level of clear insight. However damaging these effects may be, they have the one advantage of making visible a thought process which would otherwise have been lost in the immediate translucence of direct contemplation.<sup>29</sup> It is in man's thinking that we can trace the movement of *processio* and *reditus* as the universe's line of direction and in the end it is to man's speculation on the self that we are led to find that movement's roots.

Man ought to give the final answers to the problem of the status of the *Periphyseon*'s rational investigation of the universe. For Eriugena, however, this problem appears in a somewhat different guise. For him it is man who should guide the way on the path of *reditus*, the final return the universe has been awaiting ever since it first came into being. Since human nature cannot be satisfactorily explained as either the image of God or the image of created nature, it is to human nature in its own right that Eriugena turns in order to find the final justification of his queries.

In the preceding chapter we followed the discussion between Master and Student in a rather detailed manner. As I am about to draw my conclusions here it may be useful to repeat the most important aspects of it. The key passage for Eriugena's anthropology was found in *Per.* IV 776B:

But I would not say that the things themselves, which understand themselves, as far as they can, are thereby prior to themselves. For where the

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Gersh 1977 on causation in Eriugena and his Neoplatonic predecessors.

<sup>28</sup> See Gregory 1963.

<sup>29</sup> This appears to be the fundamental difference between man and the angels, *Per.* IV 772C.

thing itself and its knowledge of itself are one, I do not see how there can be precedence. For I know that I am, and yet my knowledge of myself does not precede me, because I and the knowledge by which I know myself are not separate things; and if I did not know that I was, I would still know that I did not know that I was: and therefore, whether or not I know that I am, I will not lack knowledge; for the knowledge of my ignorance will remain. And if everything which can know that it does not know itself, cannot thereby ignore the fact that it is -for if it were altogether not to be, it would not know that it did not know itself-: it follows that everything definitely is which either knows that it is or knows that it does not know that it is.

Man's being and his understanding are declared to be identical, as they ultimately appear to become interchangeable in this remarkable passage. Given the fact that the affinity of ontology and intelligibility forms one of the pillars on which the *Periphyseon's* unbroken universal harmony rests, it is to the evaluation of man's specific position that we can finally trace its roots. However common a feature the concordance of being and understanding may be in Neoplatonic circles (Eriugena in general is not an exception),<sup>30</sup> his particular emphasis on its human origin is an anthropological justification that has not been encountered before in such a huge cosmological enterprise. It is to the concrete existence of human nature, not to its ideal situation, that Eriugena relegates the bond between ontology and intelligibility in a most significant way. As we have said before, it is not the *cogito*-aspect of his phrasing that should be stressed. After all, in this early-medieval setting it is not man's existence that needs proof, but rather the universe's, which has been clearly defined as the direct object of man's rational investigation. Contrary to what was actually assumed when we started this study, urged on by sheer amazement at the widespread dimensions of *natura*, I think that what we have here is a universe that can be reduced to the human nature that lies at its basis and that bears sole responsibility for its wide scope and its precise measurements. Let me try to illustrate this point.

The dilemma that emerged as a result of two contradictory definitions of man was the following. Since man was on the one hand an eternal idea in the divine mind, while on the other he was found to have a notion of self in his own mind, Eriugena attempted the resolution of this apparent contradiction by making a distinction between things as found in their causes as opposed to in their effects. In other words, he resorted to an explanation of the differences in terms of a difference of perception or, to be more accurate, of rational understanding. This ultimately signifies that

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<sup>30</sup> For an evaluation of Eriugena's place in this tradition, see Gersh 1978 (Part Two on the transformation of pagan to Christian Neoplatonic thought, 125-190). See especially Part Three on the philosophical principles of Christian Neoplatonism (193-283) with many references to Eriugena.

the problem of interpreting (i.e. establishing) human nature is left to man himself, who thus seems to function as his own rational axis. Since any rational or intellectual process could also be qualified as dialectical, this implies that it is man's dialectical character which will provide us with the final solution to his problem of defining himself.

However, as yet such a view leaves unresolved the problem that man's dialectical nature, according to Eriugena's opinion, is disrupted by the effects of sin, which have turned his rational abilities into a caricature of their original selves. The most acute problem of Eriugena's anthropology, therefore, is to protect man's rationality from the tainting influences of sin. Since it lies beyond human power to annihilate these effects altogether, as all men are subject to its damaging influence, the only option left for Eriugena seems to build in the consequences of sin into what is a final analysis of human nature. It is the sinful aspect of man's rational nature that above all colours Eriugena's definitive account of man, when he comes to focus on the reflective aspect of his nature.

In Eriugena's analysis of the human self his first conclusion, outlined above, is that man cannot avoid inferring the absolute certainty of his being because of his intelligence. The sort of intelligence that is involved here seems not to matter at all, the question of positive or negative knowledge being at this stage indifferent. Only the human existence is of importance here. Eriugena secondly concludes that there appears to be no sequence of being and knowing, because one can never precede the other. They cannot but be completely simultaneous in man. Yet as man is defined both as a primordial cause and as a temporal effect, the question arises whether the simultaneity of being and knowing occurs indeed at both levels. For Eriugena this is unmistakably the case. But there is still a substantial difference, as it is only at the level of the effects that man seems to have some kind of notion of the self. At the level of the primordial causes, his knowledge must be unfragmented, conceiving of all humans indiscriminately. But at this level there also is no sin, on account of which man is to lose his original knowledge as soon as he enters this temporal world. Thus there is an undeniable connection between man as a created effect, his notion of self and the loss of his contemplative knowledge. We are yet to discover the precise nature of this connection.

Eriugena makes it abundantly clear that it is on account of sin that man has fallen into a state of ignorance.<sup>31</sup> His ignorance marks his state of sin in a tangible manner, just as the division into sexes has had the same effect. In a digression the Student clarifies that Christ, when setting the per-

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<sup>31</sup> *Per. IV 777A-B: Poenam praevaricationis naturae in hoc manifestari non temere dixerim. Nam si homo non peccaret, in tam profundam sui ignorantiam profecto non caderet.*

fect example for all of mankind, is not in the same way subject to any corrupting influences, so that he does not suffer the consequences of sin. Returning to the natural, undivine man in the created world, the Master states that man originally had the potential of possessing perfect knowledge. He would indeed have reached such a perfect state, had he not sinned. But it appears that his striving for beatitude, his *appetitus beatitudinis* lasts anyhow, even after sin.<sup>32</sup> However, re-evaluating the position of man (i.e. his development from an undefiled to a sinful and corrupted nature), Eriugena concentrates on man's situation before sin as his guideline in interpreting all events that come afterwards. The ties between man's perfect status and his imperfect realization of it are never broken, to the extent that, in Eriugena's view, we must still in principle be able to find examples of perfect man. More importantly, no matter what, the possibility of eternal happiness in God's image has not been completely ruled out. Thus the parallellism between the divine and the human is retained, albeit at the level of sheer possibility rather than concrete reality. Thus also, the difference between man's existence as a primordial cause and a created effect can be reconciled, the first description relating to the divine knowledge of man now being brought into co-ordination with the knowledge man has of himself and of all that is ranked below him.

Yet although the breach in the parallel development of human and divine appears to be essentially restored, one has to admit that this restoration is at most only possibility. Eriugena seems to defer its realization to the eschatological end of times. We are in fact still awaiting the unity of human and divine, as the levels of human and divine knowledge must eventually flow together. Yet this eschatological unity takes place beyond the boundaries of time and space, and thus in fact beyond the concrete evolution which Eriugena has attempted to describe in his *Periphyseon*. This universe, although endless, divine and infinite, was before anything else rational and thereby firmly established in the human mind. If the restored unity of God and man, and in his train all of creation, is at all conceivable for Eriugena, it will ultimately have to be relegated to the human mind whence it originated. The last development in Eriugena's anthropology can thus perhaps be detected in man's final reflections on the nature of his knowledge and his understanding.

### 5.3. *The Final Return of Man: One with God*

We have already touched upon the principle of Eriugena's so-called *cogito*. Contrary to what a Cartesian interpretation of it would have us

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<sup>32</sup> See *Per.* IV 777D.

assume, it is not man's knowing that defines his being. In fact, as it turns out, for Eriugena knowing and not-knowing, or knowledge and ignorance, are ultimately indifferent as far as the actual transmission of information goes. What matters is that which underlies the level where one can actually speak of either knowledge or ignorance. This I have defined as the level of man's self-awareness, his penetration of the fact that (for him) knowing and existing are at all times indistinguishable. In this case of extreme identification (which lies on the brink of what we would be inclined to define as sheer irrationalism, as there is no human reflection on either knowing or being), man is directly aligned with God, since for him both knowledge and ignorance seem to pertain to one and the same thing. It holds just as true for man as it does for God that his ultimate essence cannot be understood. One can know that man or God is, but one cannot know what man or God is. Thus the importance of negative theology as a valid way of approaching the divine essence is an entirely logical development. It is possible even to see why in the final analysis negative theology will have to prevail over all other roads to God. To draw a final conclusion on the issue of negative theology, as far as it concerns the interpretation of Eriugena's anthropology; man's essence is firmly founded on his biblical description as the image of God, and to that extent man also should be approached by means of a negative method rather than a positive one.<sup>33</sup>

Yet in the end both the negative and the affirmative method sink inevitably below the *Periphyseon's* horizon, as they both rely on what precedes them: man's actual awareness of his being as a created effect. It is man himself who by the sweep of his self-assertion creates a new level, lying beyond the traditional categories of positive and negative theology, as it were, where he can still directly communicate with God. This is not the method of direct contemplation where the subject and the object are radically separated, exchanging information in no other way than through immediate transmission. It is the method of man's broken, sinful and on the whole imperfect rational thinking. It is ultimately because of sin that man and creation can take a stand together, completely united in contrast to God.

The restored unity of man and creation is reflected in the fact that in the end all of creation can effortlessly be telescoped into man.<sup>34</sup> Given

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<sup>33</sup> *Per.* IV 771B-C: *Ut enim Deus comprehensibilis est, dum ex creatura colligitur quia est, et incomprehensibilis est, quia a nullo intellectu humano vel angelico comprehendere potest quid sit, nec a seipso, quia non est quid, quippe superessentialis: ita humanae menti hoc solum datur nosse, se esse, quid autem sit, nullo modo ei conceditur; et quod est mirabilius, et considerantibus seipsos et Deum suum pulchrius, plus laudatur mens humana in sua ignorantia, quam in sua scientia.*

<sup>34</sup> See Steel 1986; Moran 1986.

this assertion the role of creation turns out to be ultimately superfluous, for the true centre of gravity of created nature appears to be man, who must directly respond to the divine infinity. However, as yet man does not stand alone despite the fact that creation has fallen away, for Eriugena ranks man alongside the angels. Yet it has been made sufficiently clear that creation cannot be reduced to the angels in the same way that the created universe is reduced by Eriugena to the single creature of man. The main reason for this is that the angels do not need the same painful process of reasoning through which man has to go, a reasoning that is entirely dependent on information drawn from the senses.<sup>35</sup> But man and the angels agree on the final understanding of things, although for the angels there is a much shorter path by which to arrive at this mutual goal. In their rational understanding men and the angels will also yield the same knowledge of things, through which -as Eriugena has it- they seem to be born or made, so to speak, in each other. Thus they become virtually one. In fact, had man not sinned, men and angels would have been one, sharing in the same perfect knowledge. It can even be said that such a remarkable unity is still the case in the saintly examples of mankind:

For he who, as I said, has clear understanding, is created in the object of his understanding (*Per.* IV 780B).

*Qui enim, ut dixi, pure intelligit, in eo, quod intelligit, fit*, as Eriugena has it. Despite what the previous passage may have led us to believe, for Eriugena it is not perfect (i.e. angelic) knowledge that forms the criterion by which to distinguish between actual knowledge and actual ignorance. Rather, this criterion is to be found in the well-known and familiar form of discussion between two partners, of which the Master's own dialogue with his Student serves as a good and instructive example:

For this also applies to us: when we engage in a discussion, we are made in each other. For when I understand that you understand, I am made your understanding, and in an inexpressible way, I am created in you. In the same way when you clearly understand what I plainly understand, then you are made my understanding, and two understandings are made one, formed by that which we both sincerely and unhesitatingly understand. To illustrate this, let me introduce an example based on numbers: you understand that the number six is equal in its parts; and I understand this in the same way and I understand that you understand it, just as you understand that I understand it. Our individual understandings become one, formed by the number six, and through this I am created in you and you are created in me. For we are not different from our understandings; but our truest and highest essence is the understanding specified by the contemplation of the truth. (*Per.* IV 780B-C)

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<sup>35</sup> *Per.* IV 762B.

The dimensions and impact of human discussion, or to be more specific of human dialogue, which follow from the clarification of this passage, can hardly be overrated. It can no longer be denied that, for Eriugena, man, guided by the light of the divine truth, is capable of creating himself. In other words: *Qui enim, ut dixi, pure intelligit, in eo, quod intelligit, fit, i.e. creatur.*

Pursuing this line of thought found in the *Periphyseon*, one has to conclude that beneath Eriugena's universe, in which ontology and intelligibility effectively presuppose each other, we are confronted with the unmistakable view that understanding is the main, and perhaps even the only, reason for human being. One may even state that, although it is created by a transcendent God, human being is still fully dependent on human understanding. This may explain why in the *Periphyseon*'s prologue the first division into being and non-being, which was formulated in terms of whether something is understood or transcends all understanding, precedes the second division into nature's four forms. Though the second division also fits into a rational framework (i.e. that of division as an alternative form of definition), its terms of created and creative nature fall into a void when we do not presuppose that creating and being created rely on man's understanding as the main premise of the universe's existence. As to the truth of the universe's existence, Eriugena reveals not even the shadow of a doubt, for as long as man can understand that he is, even if he cannot yet know exactly what he is, the universe's infinity immediately loses its imminent impact. God has created this infinity as the most appropriate reflection of his divine being, but man -not God- as he is after all the divine image, controls it as he sets out to understand its immense dimensions. Therefore, the true creation of the universe's infinite proportions lies ultimately not with God's outward making of it, but rather with man's realization that the world in fact transcends the firm grasp of his own understanding. The universe's seemingly divine infinity is fenced in by human boundaries, which on the one hand it definitely transcends, but without which on the other hand it would not be at all.

If the divine infinity indeed goes back to man's finite understanding, this implies that we should radically change our outlook on the *Periphyseon*'s universe. We started this investigation by pointing to what was then thought of as the *Periphyseon*'s most impressive feature, namely its built-in sense of the infinite. All along man's rationality was considered to be the dynamic principle of this infinite universe, its so-called centre of gravity. But until now the universe's dominant trait was still its 'theophanic' appearance, its majestic, divine grandeur escaping ultimately all pin-pointing. However, in the context of what has been said in the above about man's notion of self as the propelling motive behind the creation of



the universe, I think we should allow for a radical change of perspective. Contrary to what a surface reading and analysis of the *Periphyseon* has led us to believe, it is man's understanding that forms the core of the *Periphyseon*'s enterprise. The *Periphyseon*'s threatening infinity must be scaled down to human proportions.

This entails far-reaching consequences for our interpretation of the Eriugenian cosmos and the position of man in this all-embracing whole. Rather than regarding man as a creature intimidated and overwhelmed by the dynamics of the infinite universe that surrounds him, we should identify the human measure as principally responsible for whatever infinity we encounter in the *Periphyseon*. The standard for measuring the divine dimension is a finite rather than an infinite one. When comparing man with the universe around him, I think that instead of considering man as some sort of microcosm (a term which Eriugena, following Gregory of Nyssa, vehemently rejects)<sup>36</sup> within the universe, we should consider this universe as essentially not only of human invention but also of human size, notwithstanding that its proportions have been blown up to match the divine infinity. Thus we are dealing in the *Periphyseon* not so much with man as a creature forlorn when set on the scale of infinity, but with man in the leading role, actively functioning as the measuring-rod for the divine. Though until now we have proceeded in our study by blowing up the figure of man, to the extent that *natura* faded into the background, this has only led to the discovery that quite the opposite situation holds true in the *Periphyseon*. In this work the background of *natura* appears to be magnified to such gigantic proportions, that its controlling instance i.e. the inquiring mind of man, stands in danger of being bypassed altogether in an analysis of Eriugena's achievement. In this respect our anthropological reading of the *Periphyseon* can only help to restore the original balance between man and *natura* as interrelated entities.

Accepting man as the dynamic measuring-principle of the *Periphyseon*, we have to adjust, or rather, correct some of our earlier conclusions concerning the structure of the Eriugenian universe. The second chapter of this study concentrated among other things on Eriugena's usage of the term 'theophany' to describe *natura* as the interplay between creative and created nature. Eriugena introduced the concept of theophany to express the indefinable divine presence in the universe. Thus the outstretched universe became the very instrument by which knowledge of the divine was communicated to created nature, especially to man. All the while the initiative was clearly on the side of the divine essence itself. It was God's will to manifest himself in created nature. Against the background of

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<sup>36</sup> *Per.* IV 793C.

Eriugena's rational investigation of the universe, the impact of this divine initiative grew in relief, when we compared it to other Eriugenian methods implemented for the purpose of reuniting the created and the divine. One such method was the path of negative theology, which ultimately brought him to a dead end. The new language he thereupon instituted, whereby positive words came to convey negative meanings, such as 'supernatural', appeared bereft of meaningful connotations. Thus the concept of theophany initiated a complete change of perspective, as it was the divine essence itself which became transmitted to created nature on its own creative terms.

Yet Eriugena evidently did not succeed in elucidating the precise impact of this concept. Ultimately its inbuilt elusive quality escaped the grasp of the human intellect, for the information of which it was especially designed. Therefore, although through theophany human knowledge of the divine could be seen to increase, man would in Eriugena's view never arrive at the *beata visio*, the immediate contemplation of God. In a sense, the notion of theophany could only imply its own failure. Be that as it may, after our anthropological reading of the *Periphyseon* the theophanic spell of the universe has in fact been broken, for man seems to impose his rational standards on the universe he investigates rather than letting himself be intimidated by something that from the very start would transcend his human capacities. Before describing Eriugena's view of the universe's return, we shall ask a final question which to a certain extent conditions that return. Under the new aegis of human intelligence as the standard of perception, has the problem of knowledge of the divine, which is directly preparatory to the reunion of creation with its divine counterpart, come any closer to a resolution?

Provided we analyze the interrelation between created and creative nature with the human factor as the dominant aspect, we will acquire a new perspective on the possibility of man's rational inquiry into the divine. Since man has been determined as the centre of gravity of *natura*, we no longer have to worry about his grasp of the universe's infinity. Even if the scope of the Eriugenian cosmos reaches beyond man's powers of understanding, he yet remains firmly in control of *natura*. Nature will ultimately comply with man's finite stature, as this provides the standard by which it is measured even in its indomitable extent. Thus the problem of man's active rational grasp of things vanishes as an issue, because there is no longer a clear dividing-line between knowledge and ignorance. With the disappearance of the distinction between knowledge and ignorance, Eriugena makes a remarkable theological statement. As knowledge and ignorance were in fact the epistemological categories through which man's state before and after his committing sin were distinguished, it seems as if the

effects of sin now lose their paralyzing grip on man's rational understanding. Thus the difference between affirmative and negative theology has been effectively neutralized. Man gains more and more confidence to set out for the reunion with the divine. Given this development, the magical spell of a theophanic world will be broken, but as yet the contents of man's knowledge in this new constellation of the universe are not revealed to us. And even in Book V of the *Periphyseon*, which completes Eriugena's rational investigation of the universe, we come nowhere near a possible *beata visio*. Even in the ultimate reunion of God with the created world,<sup>37</sup> man cannot succeed in attaining a view of God *facie ad faciem*.<sup>38</sup>

What then does the process of *reditus* accomplish for man and nature, if it is not the beatific vision itself? In the first place Eriugena states that it entails most convincingly the complete reconciliation of created nature, which means concretely that all created things will return to man. By pinpointing man as the dynamic centre of the created universe, behind which nothing can go, his position is unanimously established as forming the core of created nature. Whatever views Eriugena might have in store concerning nature's development, he will never bypass the crucial position of man. Before returning to God, all things will return to man first. The *Periphyseon* reflects Eriugena's views that the movement of return will take place in various stages. As he can be seen to endorse a largely schematized process of return, involving various strata dependent on the shifting focus of his discussion in the *Periphyseon*, it is hard to give an overview of the complete process of return. For reasons of brevity his notion of return will be depicted here only as it is found at the end of Book V, when Eriugena summarizes his teaching on *reditus*. He presents it as divided roughly into three stages, namely; a *reditus* by which all sensible things return to their intelligible causes; then a *reditus generalis* by which all of human nature returns to its original state in Christ; and finally, the so-called *reditus specialis*, the return of the elect to God.<sup>39</sup>

Let me describe the principle of the return first. As in all Neoplatonic teaching, the principle of return consists in the idea that the end of the development must converge with its beginning, so as to reinstate the circular movement which seemed to have been pointlessly interrupted. Furthermore, the return process must always strive for unity with God, even though Eriugena will continue to explain that a factual reunion with God is impossible. If God then is the ultimate end to which all things aspire,

<sup>37</sup> On Eriugena's eschatology, see Gregory 1977.

<sup>38</sup> It appears from Book V that even the beatific vision of God is still only a theophanic one, cf. *Per.* V 926C-D: ...*facie ad faciem* [1 Cor. 13:12], *faciem appellans comprehensibilem quandam humano intellectui divinae virtutis, quae a nulla creatura per seipsam perspicitur, apparitionem*.

<sup>39</sup> See *Per.* V 1020A-C.

just as he was their ultimate beginning, it remains to be seen how Eriugena thinks that they will make their way to that goal. The first stage he defines as the return of all the effects into their causes (i.e. into the eternal reasons in which they are said to subsist). This implies that the sensible and material world will perish, although we should not regard this as a complete degradation of this world,<sup>40</sup> for in Eriugena's view the material world has not come into existence as a direct result of man's sin. At this stage human nature seems not yet to be included, although it has been described as a notion eternally made in the divine mind.

Eriugena seems to reserve a special place for the return of human nature, which is made explicit when he takes up the other phases of the *reditus*. For the second mode of the return focuses explicitly on *humana natura*, which is said to return to its original state, the so-called paradise of divine dignity, by means of the *reditus generalis*. To this state all men will return, even those who have not led a good life on earth. Thus it becomes more and more clear that Eriugena's bestowal on man of a special role in the universe cannot be reduced to some sort of moral theology. It is the integrity of human nature, primarily in the sense of its intelligibility, that is of importance, not the countless individual deeds of countless individual human beings.<sup>41</sup> As human nature goes back to the divine goodness, this divine goodness should therefore manifest itself in one way or another in man.

By this we are reminded of Eriugena's theory of theophanies, as the concrete manifestations of God in the visible world. Although the visible world has perished, we will shortly see that Eriugena retains the concept of theophany, although he transposes it to a 'superessential' level, where man and God are viewed as one. It is to this third level (*reditus specialis*), i.e. that of *theosis* or deification, that only the elect among the humans will return. There they will finally be one with God. Eriugena diversifies the process of man's return by dividing it into eight stages. The first five involve a reunion of the various levels of man's existence, i.e. his body, vital motion, sense (combining the interior and the exterior sense), reason and intellect. This then sums up the idea of man's general return to God: the unification and restoration of mankind in Christ. After this general restoration of man, there follow three more stages of ascension. These merit

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<sup>40</sup> See Wohlmann 1986; see also Wohlmann 1987: ch. 2 (L'ontologie du sensible dans la philosophie de Jean Scot Érigène).

<sup>41</sup> Note that Eriugena distinguishes between the return to paradise and the eating of the tree of life. See *Per.* V 979C: ... *aliud enim est in paradisum redire, aliud de ligno vitae comedere*. By the eating from the tree of life he seems to refer to the uniting of elect with Christ in theophanic clouds. Yet it should be made clear that these stages differ with regard to the varying degrees of human understanding involved, not with regard to moral standards.

special attention, as they elucidate Eriugena's purpose for human nature in the final completion of the return.

These last three steps reflect the progressive course of man's deification, as he heads for a complete unification with the divine. In this process the first stage involves the transition of the mind, which is human nature in its purest form (i.e. its capacity as bearer of the divine image), to a state of total comprehension of the things that are below God. The following stage is the transition from *scientia* to *sapientia*, that is the contemplation of the intimate truth, albeit on the condition that it will indeed be granted to created nature. The final stage, which pertains only to the purest of minds, is when the human mind, like the sun, will appear to set (*occasus*) in God himself; it is the stage where man is confronted with the darkness of the inaccessible light. But the night will then become illuminated as if it were day. This hints at the illumination of these purified minds, each of which will be initiated into the knowledge of the divine in a manner befitting its individual qualities. However, even in this saintly state man will still see only theophanies, which appear to be rather like Eriugenian clouds of (un)knowing.<sup>42</sup>

With this return to a variety of theophanic vision the *Periphyseon* has come to an end. Though readers may think of this as disappointing, for God remains ultimately and unquestionably hidden, it ought to be stressed that there still has been definite progress. Unlike at their first introduction, here at the completion of all dynamic movement theophanies no longer produce the effect of a 'trompe-l'oeil'. This is not only because Eriugena has managed to return to their true divine origin, but because he has finally managed to establish their dynamic principle. In the paradisaical theophanies to which man will return it appears that it is a human hand, viz. Eriugena's, as it writes the *Periphyseon*, that controls the manifestation of God just as much as God himself does. Though at times there seemed to have been a random distribution of these theophanies, a practice which leaves room for manipulation (which indeed occurs in several parts of the work), I think that, having reached the end of this rational investigation, one can only conclude that, all in all, these theophanies have turned the *Periphyseon* itself into a perfect theophany. The work stands out as a perfect example of divine manifestation.

True to its underlying divine origin, the theophanic universe Eriugena has described, reveals the unmistakable hand of its master. In fact, it is hard to indicate any difference at all between the two magisterial theophanic compositions we now have before us, the divine and the human, both of which emphasize the progressively influential role of their respec-

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Per.* V 1020A-1021B.

tive authors to the same extent. Perhaps I am allowed to end with a slight critical comment to round up our analysis of Eriugena's work. In the light of man's presence as the dominating factor in the universe's theophanic design, the conclusion is inevitable that, with the *Periphyseon* nearing its end, the universe changes from reflecting a primitive 'trompe-l'oeil' into representing a rather refined 'chiaroscuro'. Thus Eriugena's descriptive universe appears successfully to encroach on the infinite universe of *natura*, which originated with God's creation. However, this also means that, in a sense, the divine original now has to give way to its descriptive counterpart. What we are left with instead is the sheer product of creative human artistry.



## LATIN APPENDIX

### Chapter one

[p.7]

Nutritor: *Saepe mihi cogitanti diligentiusque quantum vires suppetunt inquirenti rerum omnium quae vel animo percipi possunt vel intentionem eius superant primam summamque divisionem esse in ea quae sunt et in ea quae non sunt horum omnium generale vocabulum occurrit quod graece φύσις, latine vero natura vocitatur. An tibi aliter videtur?*

Alumnus: *Immo consentio. Nam et ego dum ratiocinandi viam ingredior haec ita fieri reperio.*

N. *Est igitur natura generale nomen, ut diximus, omnium quae sunt et quae non sunt?*

A. *Est quidem. Nihil enim in universo cogitationibus nostris potest occurrere quod tali vocabulo valeat carere. (Per. I 441A, Sh.-W.: 36)*

[p.9]

N. *Ipsa itaque primordialis omnium discretiva differentia quinque suae interpretationis modos inquit. Quorum primus videtur esse ipse per quem ratio suadet omnia quae corporeo sensui vel intelligentiae perceptioni succumbunt vere ac rationabiliter dici esse, ea vero quae per excellentiam suae naturae non solum omnem sensum sed etiam omnem intellectum rationemque fugiunt iure videri non esse - quae non nisi in solo deo materiaeque et in omnium rerum quae ab eo conditae sunt rationibus atque essentiis recte intelliguntur. Nec immerito; ipse nanque omnium essentia est qui solus vere est, ut ait Dionysius Ariopagita. 'Esse enim,' inquit, 'omnium est super esse divinitas.' Gregorius etiam theologus multis rationibus nullam substantiam seu essentiam sive visibilis sive invisibilis creaturae intellectu vel ratione comprehendi posse confirmat quid sit. Nam sicut ipse deus in se ipso ultra omnem creaturam nullo intellectu comprehenditur ita etiam in secretissimis creaturae ab eo factae et in eo existentis consideratus incomprehensibilis est. Quicquid autem in omni creatura vel sensu corporeo percipitur seu intellectu consideratur nihil aliud est nisi quoddam accidens incomprehensibili per se ut dictum est unicuique essentiae quae aut per qualitatem aut quantitatem aut formam aut materiem aut differentiam quandam aut locum aut tempus cognoscitur non quid est sed quia est. Iste igitur modus primus ac summus est divisionis eorum quae dicuntur esse et non esse. (Per. I 443A-C, Sh.-W.: 38-40)*

[p.18]

N. *Quoniam igitur inter nos convenit de hoc vocabulo generale esse, velim dicas divisionis eius per differentias in species rationem; aut, si tibi libet, prius conabor dividere, tuum vero erit recte iudicare.*

A. *Ingrederere quaesso. Impatiens enim sum de hac re veram rationem a te audire volens.*

N. *Videtur mihi divisio naturae per quattuor differentias quattuor species recipere, quarum prima est in eam quae creat et non creatur, secunda in eam quae et creatur et creat, tertia in eam quae creatur et non creat, quarta quae nec creat nec creatur. Harum vero quattuor binae sibi invicem opponuntur. Nam tertia opponitur primae, quarta vero secundae; sed quarta inter impossibilia ponitur cuius esse est non posse esse. Rectane tibi talis divisio videtur an non?*

A. *Recta quidem.... (Per. I 441A-442A, Sh.-W.: 36)*

[pp.21-22]

*Cum omnis pia perfectaeque doctrinae modus, quo omnium rerum ratio et studiosissime quaeritur et apertissime invenitur, in ea disciplina, quae a graecis philosophia solet vocari, sit constitutus, de eius divisionibus seu partitionibus quaedam breviter disserere necessarium duximus. Si enim, ut ait sanctus Augustinus, creditur et docetur, quod est humanae salutis caput, non aliam esse philosophiam, id est sapientiae studium, et aliam religionem, cum hi quorum doctrinam non approbamus nec sacramenta nobiscum communicant, quid est aliud de philosophia tractare, nisi verae religionis, qua summa et principalis omnium rerum causa, deus, et humiliter colitur et rationabiliter investigatur, regulas exponere? Conficitur inde veram esse philosophiam veram religionem conversissime veram religionem esse veram philosophiam. Quae, dum multifariam diversisque modis dividatur, bis binas tamen partes principales*



*ad omnem quaestionem solvendam necessarias habere dinoscitur, quas graecis placuit nominare διαιρετική, ὀριστική, ἀποδεικτική, ἀναλυτική, easdemque latialiter possumus dicere divisoriam, diffinitivam, demonstrativam, resolutivam. Quarum enim prima unum in multa dividendo segregat, secunda unum de multis diffiniendo colligit, tertia per manifesta occulta demonstrando aperit, quarta composita in simplicia separando resolvit. (De praed. I,1)*

[p.25]

N. *Quid si creaturam creatori adiunxeris ita ut nil aliud in ea intelligas nisi ipsum qui solus vere est -nil enim extra ipsum vere essentiale dicitur quia omnia quae ab eo sunt nil aliud sunt in quantum sunt nisi participatio ipsius qui a se ipso solus per se ipsum subsistit- , num negabis creatorem et creaturam unum esse?*

A. *Non facile negarim. Huic enim collectioni resistere videtur mihi ridiculosum esse.*

N. *Universitas itaque quae deo et creatura continetur prius in quattuor veluti formas divisa iterum ad unum individuum, principium quippe causamque finemque revocatur. (Per. II 528B, Sh.-W.: 12)*

[p.33]

*Universalem vero naturam formas habere propterea dicimus quoniam ex ea nostra intelligentia quodammodo formatur, dum de se ipsa tractare nititur; nam per se ipsam universa natura non ubique formas recipit. (Per. II 525B, Sh.-W.: 6)*

[p.34]

*Aliae vero duae formae, secundam dico et tertiam, non solum in nostra contemplatione gignuntur sed etiam in ipsa rerum creaturarum natura reperiuntur, in qua causae ab effectibus separantur et effectus causis adunantur quoniam in uno genere, in creatura dico, unum sunt. (Per. II 528A, Sh.-W.: 12)*

[p.35]

*Processio nanque creaturarum earundemque reditus ita simul rationi occurrunt eas inquirenti ut a se invicem inseparabiles esse videantur, et nemo de una absolute sine alterius insertione, hoc est de processione sine reditu et collectione et conversim, dignum quid ratumque potest explanare. (Per. II 529A, Sh.-W.: 14)*

## Chapter two

[p.49]

*Nulla verborum seu nominum seu quacunque articulatae vocis significatione summa omnium atque causalis essentia potest significari. (Per. I 456A, Sh.-W.: 68)*

[p.50]

N. *Una [sc. pars theologiae] quidem, id est ἀποφατική, divinam essentiam seu substantiam esse aliquid eorum quae sunt, id est quae dici aut intelligi possunt, negat; altera vero, καταφατική, omnia quae sunt de ea praedicat et ideo affirmativa dicitur -non ut confirmet aliquid esse eorum quae sunt, sed omnia quae ab ea sunt de ea posse praedicari suadeat. (Per. I 458A-B, Sh.-W.: 74)*

[pp.51 – 52]

N. *Essentia igitur dicitur deus sed proprie essentia non est. Esse enim opponitur non esse. Ὑπερούσιος igitur est, id est superessentialis. Item bonitas dicitur sed proprie bonitas non est. Bonitati enim malitia opponitur. Ὑπεράγαθος igitur, id est plus quam bonus et ὑπεραγαθότητα, id est plus quam bonitas. Deus dicitur sed non proprie deus est. Visioni enim caecitas opponitur et videnti non videns. Igitur ὑπέρθεος, id est plus quam deus. Θεός enim videns interpretatur. Sed si ad aliam originem huius nominis recurras, ita ut non a verbo θεωρῶ, id est video, sed a verbo θέω, id est curro, θεόν, id est deum, derivari intelligas, adest tibi similiter eadem ratio. Nam currenti non currens opponitur sicut tarditas celeritati. Erit igitur ὑπέρθεος, id est plus quam currens, sicut scriptum est: 'Velociter currit sermo eius.' Nam hoc de deo verbo, quod ineffabiliter per omnia quae sunt ut sint currit, intelligimus. (Per. I 459D-460A, Sh.-W.: 76-78)*

[p.54]

N. *Intende igitur diligentius. Nam cum ad perfectae ratiocinationis contuitum perveneris, satis clarum considerabis haec duo quae videntur inter sese esse contraria nullo modo sibi in se opponi dum circa divinam naturam versantur, sed per omnia in omnibus sibi invicem consentiunt; et ut hoc apertius fiat paucis utamur exemplis. Verbi gratia: καταφατική dicit: Veritas est; ἀποφατική contradicit: Veritas non est. Hic videtur quaedam forma contradictionis, sed dum intentius inspicitur nulla controversia reperitur. Nam quae dicit: Veritas est, non affirmat proprie divinam substantiam veritatem esse sed tali nomine per metaforam a creatura ad creatorem vocari posse. Nudam siquidem omnique propria significatione relictam divinam essentiam talibus vocabulis vestit. Ea vero quae dicit: Veritas non est, merito divinam naturam incomprehensibilem ineffabilemque clare cognoscens non eam negat esse, sed veritatem nec vocari proprie nec esse. Omnibus enim significationibus quas καταφατική divinitatem induit ἀποφατική eam spoliare non nescit. Una enim dicit: Sapientia est, verbi gratia, eam induens; altera dicit: Sapientia non est, eandem exuens. Una igitur dicit: Hoc vocari potest, sed non dicit: Hoc proprie est; altera dicit: Hoc non est, quamvis ex hoc appellari potest. (Per. I 461B-D, Sh.-W.: 80-82)*

[p.56]

N. *Fiat igitur, si placet, praesentis huius quaestionis solutio hoc modo: ut haec nomina quae adiectione 'super' vel 'plus quam' particularum de deo praedicantur, ut est superessentialis plus quam veritas plus quam sapientia et similia, duarum praedictarum theologiae partium in se plenissime sint comprehensiva, ita ut in pronuntiatione formam affirmativae, intellectu vero virtutem abdicativae obtineant. Et hoc brevi concludamus exemplo: Essentia est, affirmatio; essentia non est, abdicatio; superessentialis est, affirmatio simul et abdicatio, in superficie etenim negatione caret, intellectu negatione pollet. Nam quae dicit: Superessentialis est, non quod est dicit sed quid non est; dicit enim essentiam non esse sed plus quam essentiam, quid autem illud est quod plus quam essentia est non exprimit. Dicit enim deum non esse aliquod eorum quae sunt sed plus quam ea quae sunt esse, illud autem esse quid sit nullo modo diffinit. (Per. I 462C-D, Sh.-W.: 82-84)*

[p.59]

A. *Non est igitur οὐσία quia plus est quam οὐσία, et tamen dicitur οὐσία quia omnium οὐσίων id est essentiarum creatrix est. (Per. I 464A, Sh.-W.: 86)*

[p.61]

N. *Iam vero alteram, καταφατικήν dico, conamur inspicere eo duce qui quaeritur et qui quaerit se quaeri et se quaerentibus occurrit et inveniri desiderat. Et ea pars est quae contemplatur quid de divina natura veluti proprie proferendum cauteque et rationabiliter intelligendum. (Per. II 599D, Sh.-W.: 166-168)*

[pp.63–64]

N. *Sed haec altius ac verius cogitantur quam sermone proferuntur et altius ac verius intelliguntur quam cogitantur, altius autem ac verius sunt quam intelliguntur; omnem siquidem intellectum superant. Nam quaecunque de simplicissimae bonitatis trinitate dicuntur seu cogitantur seu intelliguntur vestigia quaedam sunt atque theophaniae veritatis, non autem ipsa veritas quae superat omnem theoriā non solum rationalis verum etiam intellectualis creaturae. Neque enim talis unitas est seu trinitas qualis ab ulla creatura potest excogitari seu intelligi seu aliqua fantasia quamvis lucidissima et verisimillima formari - haec enim omnia fallunt dum in eis finis contemplationis ponitur - siquidem plus quam unitas est et plus quam trinitas. Iubemur tamen aliquid de ea dicere et cogitare et intelligere quantum intellectus eam attingit sancta theologia duce atque magistra ut quodam modo materiam habeamus laudandi eam atque benedicendi. (Per. II 614B-D, Sh.-W.: 200)*

[p.69]

N. *Ex ipsa igitur sapientiae dei condensatione ad humanam naturam per gratiam et exaltatione eiusdem naturae ad ipsam sapientiam per dilectionem fit theophania. (Per. I 449B, Sh.-W.: 52)*

[p.70]

N. *Ac per hoc intellige divinam essentiam per se incomprehensibilem esse, adiunctam vero intellectuali creaturae mirabili modo apparere ita ut ipsa, divina dico essentia, sola in ea, creatura intellectuali*

*videlicet, appareat. Ipsius enim ineffabilis excellentia omnem naturam sui participem superat ut nil aliud in omnibus praeter ipsam intelligentibus occurrat dum per se ipsam, ut diximus, nullo modo appareat. (Per. I 450B, Sh.-W.: 54-56)*

[p.71]

*At si creatura ex deo, erit deus causa, creatura autem effectus. Si autem nil aliud est effectus nisi causa facta, sequitur deum causam in effectibus suis fieri. (Per. III 687C, Sh.-W.: 182)*

### Chapter three

[p.90]

*Ac per hoc intelligitur, quod ars illa, quae dividit genera in species, et species in genera resolvit, quae διαλεκτική dicitur, non ab humanis machinationibus sit facta, sed in natura rerum, ab auctore omnium artium, quae vere artes sunt, condita, et a sapientibus inventa, et ad utilitatem solerti rerum indagine usitata. (Per. IV 748D-749A)*

[p.96]

*...qui est super omnem essentiam et intelligentiam, cuius neque ratio est neque intelligentia neque dicitur neque intelligitur neque nomen eius est neque verbum. Non autem irrationabiliter, ut saepe diximus, omnia quae a summo usque deorsum sunt de eo dici possunt quadam similitudine aut dissimilitudine aut contrarietate aut oppositione quoniam ab ipso omnia sunt quae de eo praedicari possunt. Non enim similia sibi solummodo condidit sed etiam dissimilia quoniam ipse similis est et dissimilis, contrariorum quoque causa est....(Per. I 510C-D, Sh.-W.: 192)*

[p.99]

*At si creatura ex deo, erit deus causa, creatura autem effectus. Si autem nil aliud est effectus nisi causa facta, sequitur deum causam in effectibus suis fieri. Non enim ex causa in effectus suos procedit quod a sui natura alienum sit. Siquidem in calorem et in lucem nil aliud nisi ipsa vis ignea erumpit. (Per. III 687C, Sh.-W.: 182)*

[p.107]

*Quartus hic, ab operibus sextae propheticae contemplationis de conditione universitatis inchoans, reditum omnium in eam naturam, quae nec creat nec creatur, consideraturus, finem constituat. (Per. IV 743C)*

### Chapter four

[p.134]

*N. Sed quia haec forma animalis, quae in homine constituta est, ceterorum animalium naturam, quae sub eodem genere sunt, dignitate rationis et intelligentiae superat, provide prophetica contemplatio eam ceteris animalibus adjungere voluit, ut conditionem ipsius, juxta suae naturae excellentiam, latius et copiosius in fine omnium, quae a Deo facta sunt, narraret. Species igitur animalis maxima et pretiosissima bis in operibus sextae speculationis commemoratur: primum quidem in genere suo, quod est animal, jubetur a terra produci; deinde paulo post, ceterorum animalium brevissima divisione facta, conditio ejus ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei introducit. (Per. IV 750B-C)*

[p.135]

*...quae omne, quod in animalium natura comprehenditur, excellentia substantiae incomprehensibiliter superant. (Per. IV 753A)*

[p.136]

*N. Duae animas in uno homine nec ratio, nec divina auctoritas sinit me arbitrari; imo etiam prohibet, nec ulli recte philosophantium fas est aestimare. Unam vero eandemque rationabilem animam humano corpori ineffabili modo adjunctam hominem esse assero, ipsumque hominem mirabili quadam et intel-*

*ligibili divisione ea parte, qua ad imaginem et similitudinem Creatoris factus est, nullius animalitatis participem esse, et ab ea omnino absolutam, ea vero, qua animalitati communicat, in universali animalium genere de terra, hoc est de communi omnium natura productum. (Per. IV 754A-B)*

[p.136]

*Tota enim in seipsa ubique est per totum. (Per. IV 754B-C)*

[p.138]

*N. Quid igitur mirum, si de homine, qui solus inter cetera animalia ad imaginem Dei factus est, vere simul possit praedicari, homo animal est, non est animal homo, ut per hoc saltem intelligamus, ad imaginem Dei illud animal specialiter esse conditum, de quo pugnancia sibi in aliis animantibus proloquia vere simul praedicantur? Porro si propterea divinae essentiae affirmationes et negationes conveniunt, quoniam superat omnia, quae ab ea facta sunt et quorum causa est, cui non liceat prospicere, negationes et affirmationes imagini et similitudini ejus, quae in homine est, unanimiter convenire, quandoquidem superat cetera animalia, inter quae sub uno genere conditus est, et cujus causa condita sunt? Quis enim recte sapientium ignoravit, hunc mundum visibilem cum omnibus suis partibus, a summo usque deorsum, propter hominem esse factum, ut ei praeesset, et dominaretur omnium rerum visibilium? (Per. IV 758A-B)*

[p.139]

*N. Ut enim Deus et supra omnia et in omnibus est, ipse siquidem essentia omnium est, qui vere solus est, et cum in omnibus totus sit, extra omnia totus esse non desinit, totus in mundo, totus circa mundum, totus in creatura sensibili, in intelligibili totus, totus universitatem facit, in universitate totus fit, in toto universitatis totus, in partibus ejus totus, quia ipse est et totum et pars, et neque totum neque pars: ita humana natura in mundo suo, in universitate sua, in partibus suis visibilibus et invisibilibus tota in seipsa est, et in toto suo tota est, et in partibus suis tota, partesque ejus in seipsis totae, et in toto totae. Nam et extrema pars ejus et vilissima, corpus dico, secundum rationes suas tota est in toto homine, quoniam corpus, in quantum vere corpus est, in rationibus suis subsistit, quae in prima conditione factae sunt, et cum in seipsa ita sit, humana videlicet natura, totum suum excedit. (Per. IV 759A-B)*

[p.139]

*...totam [sc. humanam naturam] in seipsa ubique esse, et imaginem in animali totam, et animal in imagine totum. (Per. IV 761B)*

[p.140]

*Non enim peccatum de homine fecit animal, sed natura. (Per. IV 763A)*

[p.141]

*N. Non enim aliter conditori suo adhaerere posset, si omnia, quae sub ipsa sunt, et seipsam non excederet, quoniam 'inter mentem nostram', ut ait Augustinus, 'qua Patrem intelligimus, et veritatem, per quam ipsum intelligimus, nulla interposita creatura est'. (Per. IV 759B-C) (De ver. rel. LV, 113)*

[p.141]

*O amice Timothee, circa mysticas speculationes corroborato itinere et sensus desere, et intellectuales operationes, et sensibilia et invisibilia, et omne non ens et ens, et ad unitatem, ut possibile, inscius restituere ipsum, qui est super omnem essentiam et scientiam; ea enim teipso et omnibus immensurabili et absoluto mentis excessu, ad superessentialem divinarum tenebrarum radium, omnia deserens et ab omnibus absolutus ascendes. (Per. IV 759C) (Myst. Theol. §1, PG 3 997B-999A)*

[p.143]

*A. Ac per hoc quadam ratione per humanae naturae consequentiam totus homo ad imaginem Dei factus non incongrue dicitur, quamvis proprie et principaliter in solo animo imago subsistere intelligatur, eo ordine, ut animus quidem a Deo, nulla alia creatura interposita, vitalis autem motus ab animo, postremo per vitalem motum ab animo materia formationis suae causam accipiat: ita ut materia vitalem motum sequatur, vitalis motus animum, animus ipsum Deum, ad quem conversus naturae suae integritatem et pulchritudinem custodit, aversus vero ab eo, et seipsum, et quae sibi subjecta sunt, materiale vitalem*

*dico, ipsamque materiam dissipat atque deformat. (Per. IV 790C-791A)*

[p.143]

*Qualem igitur ipsius Dei, et Deo similis differentiam contemplabimur? In hoc illud quidem non creatum, hoc vero per creationem subsistit. (Per. IV 796B)*

[p.144]

*Res enim est dominatu carens ac voluntaria virtus. (Per. IV 796B)*

[p.145]

*N. Praefati itaque magni theologi verba, quae a te introducta sunt, nil aliud videntur suadere, quam ut hominem intelligamus solo animo et virtutibus ei naturaliter insitis ad imaginem Dei factum - insunt autem ei sapientia, scientia, ratiocinandi virtus, ceteraeque virtutes, quibus ornatur anima, similitudinem in se Creatoris sui exprimens - et quod omnes homines semel et simul facti sunt in illo uno homine, de quo scriptum est: 'Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram' [Gen. 1:26], et: 'In quo omnes peccaverunt' [Rom. 5:12]; adhuc enim ille unus omnis fuit, et in quo omnes beatitudine paradisi expulsi sunt. Et si homo non peccaret, in geminum sexum simplicitatis suae divisionem non pateretur. Quae divisio omnino divinae naturae imaginis et similitudinis experts est, et nullo modo esset, si homo non peccaret, sicut nullo modo erit post restaurationem naturae in pristinum statum, qui post catholicam resurrectionem cunctorum hominum manifestabitur. Quapropter si homo non peccaret, nullus utriusque sexus copula, nec ullo semine nasceretur, .... Quoniam vero praevidit Deus, qui nec fallit nec fallitur, hominem conditionis suae ordinem et dignitatem deserturum, supermachinatus est alterum multiplicationis humanae naturae modum, quo mundus iste locorum et temporum intervallis perageretur, ut homines generalis delicti generalem luerent poenam, ex corruptibili semine, sicut et cetera animalia, nascentes. (Per. IV 799A-C)*

[p.147]

*N. Cur ergo non simul faceret, quae facienda simul videbat et volebat? Nam cum dicimus ante et post peccatum, cogitationumstrarum mutabilitatem monstramus, dum adhuc temporibus subdimur: Deo autem simul erant et peccati praescientia ejusque consequentia. Homini siquidem, non Deo, futurum erat peccatum, et consequentia peccati praecessit peccatum in homine, quoniam et ipsum peccatum praecessit seipsum in eodem homine. Mala quippe voluntas, quod est peccatum occultum, praecessit veliti fructus gustum, quod est peccatum apertum. (Per. IV 808A-B)*

[p.148]

*N. Proinde plus, ut arbitror, laus illa vitae hominis in paradiso referenda est ad futuram ejus vitam, si obediens permaneret, quam ad peractam, quae solummodo inchoaverat, nec unquam steterat. (Per. IV 809B)*

[pp.150 – 151]

*Qua hominem liberare, et ad divinam beatitudinem reducere volens, naturam hominum creans, Verbum homo ex hominibus vere fit, et nascitur corporaliter sine peccato per hominem. (Per. IV 813A)*

[p.152]

*N. Natura siquidem rationalis et intellectualis, quamvis noluit falli, potuit tamen decipi, praesertim cum nondum formationis suae perfectionem acceperit, quam merito obedientiae esset acceptura in theosin, deificationem dico, transformanda. Non ergo debemus de humana natura judicare, secundum quod corporeis sensibus apparet, et merito praevaricationis poenaliter ad similitudinem irrationabilium animalium per copulam sexuum in hoc mundo nascitur temporaliter corruptibiliterque, cujus finis mors est, verum secundum quod ad imaginem Dei, priusquam peccaret, condita est. (Per. IV 760D-761A)*

[p.155]

*... non solum paradisum spiritualiter intelligi, verum etiam nihil aliud esse paradisum nisi ipsum hominem, manifestissime astruit. (Per. IV 815C)*

[p.156]

N. Quoniam in unoquoque homine duo quidam homines intelliguntur, dicente Apostolo: Exteriorem hominem corrumpi, interiore vero renovari, merito interior, qui ad imaginem Dei factus est, in paradiso formatur, exterior vero et corruptibilis extra et infra paradisum de limo terrae fingitur; qui etiam apprehensus in paradiso ponitur, quoniam, si in ipso salutem suam operaretur, divinumque custodiret praeceptum, poterat etiam ad dignitatem superioris conditionis ad imaginem Dei pervenire. Quoniam vero noluit divino obedire praecepto, non solum Creatorem suum, verum etiam dignitatem imaginis ejus deseruit. Ac per hoc in geminum sexum scissus est, in masculum videlicet et feminam: quae discussio non ex natura, sed ex vitio causam accepit. (Per. IV 817C-D)

[pp.157 – 158]

N. Quisquis diligenter praefati Theologi verba perspexerit, nil aliud, ut opinor, in eis reperiet suaderi, quam humanam naturam ad imaginem Dei factam paradisi vocabulo, figuratae locutionis modo, a divina Scriptura significari. Vera enim plantatio Dei est natura ipsa, quam ad imaginem et similitudinem suam, hoc est, ad imaginem omnino sibi similem, praeter rationem subjecti, ut praedictum est, creavit in Eden, hoc est, in deliciis aeternae felicitatis, et beatitudine divinae similitudinis, major et melior omni sensibili mundo non mole, sed dignitate naturae. Cujus terra fertilis erat corpus essenziale, immortale per possibilitatem. . . . Cujus aqua formarum capax sensus incorruptibilis corporis. . . ,cujus aër divinae sapientiae radiis illuminatus ratio erat. . . ,cujus aether, animus. (Per. IV 822A-C)

[p.159]

N. Nulla enim alia pars humanae naturae falsitatis errorem recipit praeter sensum exteriorem, siquidem per ipsum et interior sensus, et ratio, ipse etiam intellectus saepissime fallitur. In loco itaque falsitatis et vanarum phantasiarum, hoc est, in sensu corporeo, qui a Graecis αἰσθησις vocatur, et sub figura mulieris insinuat, γυναικὸν, hoc est, lignum scientiae boni et mali constituitur, malitia videlicet in phantasia boni colorata, vel malum configuratum bono, vel, ut simpliciter dicam, falsum bonum, vel malum sub figura boni latens, cujus fructus mixta scientia est, hoc est, confusa. (Per. IV 826B)

[p.160]

N. Non ergo in natura humana plantatum est malum, sed in perverso et irrationabili motu rationabilis liberaeque voluntatis est constitutum. Qui motus non intra naturam, sed extra. . . (Per. IV 828D)

[p.161]

N. Unum namque paradisum divina narrat historia, et unum hominem in ipso creatum, in quo videlicet homine vir et mulier intelligitur esse, si verba sanctorum Patrum sequenda sunt. Naturae siquidem humanae vir est intellectus, qui a Graecis vocatur νοῦς; mulier sensus, qui feminino genere αἰσθησις exprimitur: quorum mystico conjugio Christi et Ecclesiae futura copula praefigurata est. Cui viro atque mulieri, intellectui videlicet sensuique, divina lex non solum concessit, verum etiam praecepit de ligno vitae comedere, de sapientia profecto Patris et Verbo, quod est Dominus Jesus Christus, qui in medio humanae naturae paradisi plantatus est, qui est spiritualis panis, quo angeli perfectique homines, quorum conversatio in caelis est, vescuntur. Prohibentur autem a non discreto atque commixto boni et mali appetitu, qui ex delectatione materialium rerum pulchritudinis imperfectis animabus infigitur: a quo abstinere meritum vitae aeternae est, eo abuti aeterni interitus occasio. (Per. IV 833A-B)

[p.161]

N. Cetera vero, quae a sacra Scriptura de paradiso traduntur, quamvis per anticipationem dicta sint, ac veluti in paradiso facta, plus tamen et rationabilius, quoniam merito peccati superaddita sunt, et ad exteriorem hominem pertinent, extra paradisum post peccatum fuisse intelligenda. (Per. IV 833B-C)

[p.163]

N. Haec igitur, ut praediximus, quae post soporem immissum in Adam divina narrat Scriptura, quamvis in paradiso veluti facta legantur, rationabilius tamen, et veritati congruentius, post peccatum, ac per hoc extra paradisum humanae naturae merito inobedientiae superaddita credenda et intelligenda sunt. Si enim plantatio Dei est et paradisus in deliciis humana natura ad imaginem Dei facta, nullaque praevaricationis contagione deformata, quicquid extra dignitatem naturae causaeque peccati factum intelligitur, cur non etiam extra paradisum fuisse non intelligeretur, ignoro. Non ignoro autem usitatissimum

*divinae Scripturae tropum, qui a Graecis ὑστερον πρότερον, a Latinis vero praeposterum seu anticipatio, quam Graeci προλήψιν dicunt, vocatur; quo Matthaeus evangelista usus est, passionem et resurrectionem Domini narrans. (Per. IV 837A-B)*

[p.164]

N. *Si enim paradisi est humana natura, ad imaginem Dei condita, et in angelicae beatitudinis aequalitate constituta, mox profecto, ut Creatorem suum deserere voluit, ex dignitate suae naturae lapsa est. Nam et priusquam uxori suae consentiret, superbire inchoavit. Porro si nullum spatium temporis inter conditionem ipsius et lapsum divina tradit historia, quid aliud datur intelligi Scripturae silentio, nisi hominem mox, ut conditus est, superbiisse, ac per hoc corruisse? (Per. IV 838A-B)*

[pp.166 – 167]

N. *Adam, ubi es? Haec vox est Creatoris humanam naturam increpantis. Ac si dixisset: Ubi nunc es post praevaricationem? Non enim ibi te reperio, ubi te creatum cognosco; non in ea dignitate, qua ad imaginem et similitudinem meam te feci, invenio, sed desertorem beatitudinis, verique luminis fugitantem, et in latibulis malae conscientiae latitantem increpo, causamque tuae inobedientiae inquiri. Putasne me ignorare quid fecisti, vel quo fugisti, vel quomodo timens vocem meam te abscondisti, vel quemadmodum nuditatem tuam, sinceritatem videlicet et simplicitatem naturae, in qua conditus eras, sero cognovisti? Nonne haec omnia perpessus es, quia ex ligno, de quo praeceperam tibi ne comederes, comedisti? Nam si non comedisses, non fortassis vocem deambulantis in te Creatoris tui timeres, nec a facie ipsius fugeres, nec nuditatem tuam, quam praevaricando perdidisti, cognovisses. (Per. IV 841D-842A)*

[p.167]

N. *Miror, cur te dicis ignorare ea, quae propter tuam inobedientiam atque superbiam facta sunt. Ego autem, qui in te peccavi, et peccando mortuus sum, non ignoro. Clamat enim in me inconcussa et apertissima ratio, quod etiam approbat multorum Patrum auctoritas, quod si humana natura in ipsa simplicissima sincerissimaque divinae imaginis beatitudine permaneret, nulli sexui succumberet, nullam contumeliosam propagationem sicut insipientia animantia subiret. (Per. IV 846A)*

[p.168]

N. *Quoniam vero in dignitate illa, in qua condita est, perseverare noluit, sed ignobiliter inter cetera animalia multiplicari elegit, idem ipse conditor, quicquid facturus et futurus esset homo perverso motu liberae voluntatis perditus, praevidit, et duplicem sexum, per quem propagaretur bestiarum instar, superaddidit. ... Quod etiam divina ironia apertissime declarat, quae dicit: Non est bonum hominem esse solum, faciamus ei adiutorium simile. (Per. IV 846A-B)*

[p.168]

N. *Faciamus ergo ei adiutorium simile, quo id, quod appetit, peragere possit, feminam videlicet, quae similiter, ut masculus, fragilis ac lubrica, terrenas appetat concupiscentias. (Per. IV 846C)*

[p.168]

N. *Talis itaque remotio criminis nil defensionis contulit, cumulum vero damnationis exaggeravit. (Per. IV 846D)*

[p.169]

N. *Non enim Deus maledicit ea, quae fecit, sed benedicit; animus autem et sensus creatura Dei sunt. Carnalis vero delectatio extra divinam conditionem, irrationabilibus humanae animae passionibus orta est, ideoque divinae sententiae severitati succumbit, quia extra naturae a Deo factae supervenit. Quid enim aliud est divina maledictio, nisi eorum, qui extra naturam sunt, eamque contaminant, justissima et irrevocabilis damnatio? (Per. IV 848C-D)*

[p.170]

N. *Sed hoc dissidium divortiumque animi et sensus, quando restaurabitur natura et ad naturalem ordinem revocabitur, in pacem spiritualis naturalisque conjugii vertetur, quando corpus sensui, sensus animo, animus Deo subditus et obediens erit. (Per. IV 856A)*

[pp.170–171]

N. *Tanto tempore in purgationis tuae per actionem et scientiam laboribus sudabit vultus tuus, hoc est rationabilis inquisitio veritatis, donec convertaris in terram, de qua sumptus es, hoc est, in soliditatem incommutabilem primordialium causarum, ex quibus originem ducis. Non enim ulterius sudabis, dum illuc perveneris. (Per. IV 858B)*

[p.175]

N. *Omnem quidem creaturam visibilem et invisibilem in homine fecit, quoniam ipsi universitas conditae naturae inesse intelligitur.... Si ergo Deus hominem in genere animalium non crearet, vel certe si omnium animalium totam naturam in homine non substitueret, quomodo universa creatura visibilis et invisibilis in eo comprehenderetur, ac per hoc rationabiliter possumus dicere, propterea Deus hominem in genere animalium voluit substituere, quoniam in ipso omnem creaturam voluit creare. Cur autem in ipso omnem creaturam voluit creari, si a me quaeris, respondeo, quia ad imaginem et similitudinem suam voluit eum facere, ut quemadmodum principale exemplum superat omnia essentiae excellentia, ita imago ejus superaret omnia creationis dignitate et gratia. (Per. IV 763D-764B)*

[p.176]

N. *Omne, quod cognoscitur intellectu et ratione, seu corporeo sensu imaginatur, putasne, in ipso, qui intelligit et sentit, quodammodo posse creari et effici? (Per. IV 765C)*

[p.177]

A. *Quamvis enim imperita et insipiens nasci videatur, quod ei accidit divini transgressionis mandati, qua et suimet et Creatoris sui oblita est, doctrinae tamen regulis reformata Deum suum et seipsam, suique peritiam et disciplinam, et omnia, quae naturaliter in ea subsistunt, in seipsa potest reperire, Redemptoris sui gratia illuminata (Per. IV 767C)*

[p.177]

N. *Sola itaque divina mens notitiam humanae mentis, peritiae disciplinalisque a se formatae et ad se, veram possidet in se ipsa. (Per. IV 768A)*

[p.178]

A. *Imo vero intelligo, non aliam esse substantiam totius hominis, nisi suam notionem in mente artificis, qui omnia, priusquam fierent, in seipso cognovit; ipsamque cognitionem substantiam esse veram, ac solam eorum, quae cognita sunt, quoniam in ipsa perfectissime facta et aeternaliter et immutabiliter subsistunt.*

N. *Possumus ergo hominem definire sic: Homo est notio quaedam intellectualis in mente divina aeternaliter facta. (Per. IV 768B)*

[p.180]

N. *Aliter enim humana substantia per conditionem in intellectualibus perspicitur causis, aliter per generationem in effectibus. Ibi quidem omni mutabilitate libera, hic mutabilitati obnoxia; ibi simplex omnibusque accidentibus absoluta omnem effugit contuitum et intellectum, hic compositionem quandam ex quantitativis et qualitatibus, ceterisque, quae circa eam intelliguntur, accipit, per quam mentis recipit intuitum. (Per. IV 771A)*

[p.180]

N. *Utrumque verum esse ratio perdocet: humana siquidem mens et seipsam novit, et seipsam non novit. Novit quidem quia est, non autem novit quid est. Ac per hoc, ut in prioribus libris docuimus, maxime imago Dei esse in homine docetur. (Per. IV 771B)*

[p.181]

N. *Laudabilius namque in ea est, se nescire quid sit, quam scire quia est, sicut plus et convenientius pertinet ad divinae naturae laudem negatio ejus quam affirmatio, et sapientius est ignorare illam quam nosse, cujus ignorantia vera est sapientia, quae melius nesciendo scitur; Apertissime ergo divina similitudo in humana mente dignoscitur, dum solummodo esse scitur; quid autem est, nescitur; et, ut ita dicam, negatur in ea quid esse, affirmatur solummodo esse. Nec hoc ratione vacat. Si enim cognosceretur quiddam*



*esse, circumscripta profecto in aliquo esset, ac per hoc imaginem sui Creatoris non omnino in se exprimeret, qui omnino incircumscribitus est, et in nullo intelligitur, quia infinitus est, super omne, quod dicitur et intelligitur, superessentialis. (Per. IV 771C-D)*

[p.182]

*N. Siquidem videmus in homine non perpauca, quae in angelo subsistere, nec auctoritas tradit, nec ratio intelligit, ut hoc corpus animale, quod etiam ante peccatum humanae animae adjunctum fuisse divina Scriptura testatur, corporeus quoque quinquepertitus sensus exterior, rerumque sensibilibus phantasiae, quae per eum humanae animae ingeruntur, ratiocinationis quoque in inquirendis rerum naturis perplexio morosaeque difficultas, in discernendis item virtutibus et vitiis laboriosa solertia, plurimaeque id genus. His enim omnibus angelicam essentiam carere perspicuum, et tamen naturae rerum inesse nemo recte sapientium abnegarit. (Per. IV 772C-D)*

[p.183]

*A....non hominem in genere animalium, sed magis omne genus animalium in homine de terra, hoc est soliditate naturae productum, et non solum omne genus animalium, verum etiam universitatem conditam in homine factam...(Per. IV 774B)*

[p.184]

*A. Scio enim me esse, nec tamen me praecedat scientia mei, quia non aliud sum, et aliud scientia, qua me scio; et si nescirem me esse, non nescirem ignorare me esse: ac per hoc, sive scivero, sive nescivero me esse, scientia non carebo; mihi enim remanebit scire ignorantiam meam. Et si omne, quod potest scire se ipsum nescire, non potest ignorare se ipsum esse; nam si penitus non esset, non sciret seipsum nescire: conficitur, omnino esse omne, quod scit se esse, vel scit se nescire se esse. Si quis autem tanta ignorantia obrutus est, ut nec seipsum esse sciat, nec nescire seipsum esse sentiat, aut penitus talem non esse: hominem, aut omnino extinctum dixerim. (Per. IV 776B-C)*

[p.186]

*N. Quare ergo unusquisque mox, ut per generationem in hunc mundum provenerit, non seipsum cognoscit?*

*A. Poenam praevaricationis naturae in hoc manifestari non temere dixerim. Nam si homo non peccaret, in tam profundam sui ignorantiam profecto non caderet. (Per. IV 777A-B)*

[p.187]

*A. Ipse siquidem, qui solus absque peccato natus est in mundo, Redemptor videlicet mundi, nusquam nunquam talem ignorantiam perpessus est, sed confestim, ut conceptus et natus est, et seipsum et omnia intellexit, ac loqui et docere potuit, non solum quia sapientia Patris erat, quam nihil latet, verum etiam quia incontaminatam humanitatem acceperat, ut contaminatam purgaret; non quia aliam accepit praeter eam quam restituit, sed quia ipse solus incontaminatus in ea remansit, et ad medicamentum vulneris vitatae naturae in secretissimis ipsius rationibus reservatus. Tota quippe in totis periit, praeter illum, in quo solo incorruptibilis permansit. Et quidem maximum exemplum gratiae ipse est, non quia quid ex reatu humanae naturae indultum ei sit, sed quia solus omnium nullis praecedentibus meritis in unitatem substantiae verbo Dei conjunctus est, in quo omnes electi, de plenitudine gratiae ejus accipientes, filii Dei et participes divinae substantiae fiunt. (Per. IV 777B-C)*

[p.187]

*N. Inerat ergo humanae naturae potentia perfectissimam sui cognitionem habendi, si non peccaret.*

*A. Nil verisimilius. Casus quippe illius maximus et miserrimus erat, scientiam et sapientiam sibi insitam deserere, et in profundam ignorantiam suimet et Creatoris sui labi, quamvis appetitus beatitudinis, quam perdiderat, etiam post casum in ea remansisse intelligatur, qui in ea nullo modo remaneret, si seipsam et Deum suum omnino ignoraret. (Per. IV 777C-D)*

[p.188]

*N. Si ergo humanae naturae ante peccatum inerat et suimet perfecta cognitio, et Creatoris sui, quid mirum, si rationabiliter de ea intelligatur, plenissimam scientiam similium sui naturarum, ut sunt caelestes essentiae, et inferiorum se, ut est mundus iste cum rationibus suis intellectui succumbentibus, habuisse,*

*et adhuc sola possibilitate et re ipsa in summis hominibus habere?*

A. *Clare intelligentibus non erit mirum, sed verum et verisimile. (Per. IV 778C)*

[p.189]

N. *Qui enim, ut dixi, pure intelligit, in eo, quod intelligit, fit. Natura itaque intellectualis et rationalis angelica in natura intellectuali et rationali humana facta est, quemadmodum et humana in angelica per reciprocam cognitionem, qua et angelus hominem intelligit, et homo angelum. Nec mirum. Nam et nos, dum disputamus, in nobismet invicem efficimur. Siquidem dum intelligo quod intelligis, intellectus tuus efficior, et ineffabili quodam modo in te factus sum. Similiter quando pure intelligis quod ego plane intelligo, intellectus meus efficeris, ac de duobus intellectibus fit unus, ab eo, quod ambo sincere et incunctanter intelligimus, formatus. Verbi gratia, ut ex numeris exemplum introducamus: senarium numerum suis partibus esse aequalem intelligis; et ego similiter intelligo, et intelligere te intelligo, sicut et me intelligis intelligere. Uterque noster intellectus unus fit senario numero formatus, ac per hoc et ego in te creor, et tu in me crearis. Non enim aliud sumus, aliud noster intellectus; vera siquidem ac summa nostra essentia est intellectus contemplatione veritatis specificatus. (Per. IV 780B-C)*

### Chapter five

[p.197]

*Talis itaque remotio criminis nil defensionis contulit, cumulum vero damnationis exaggeravit. (Per. IV 846D)*

[p.199]

*Possumus ergo hominem definire sic: Homo est notio quaedam intellectualis in mente divina aeternaliter facta. (Per. IV 768B)*

[pp.207 – 208]

*Res autem ipsas, quae se intelligunt, in quantum se intelligere possunt, non dixerim esse semet priores. Nam ubi res ipsa et sui cognitio unum est, qualis praecessio fieri potest, non video. Scio enim me esse, nec tamen me praecedat scientia mei, quia non aliud sum, et aliud scientia, qua me scio; et si nescirem me esse, non nescirem ignorare me esse: ac per hoc, sive scivero, sive nescivero me esse, scientia non carebo; mihi enim remanebit scire ignorantiam meam. Et si omne, quod potest scire se ipsum nescire, non potest ignorare se ipsum esse; nam si penitus non esset, non sciret se ipsum nescire: conficitur, omnino esse omne, quod scit se esse, vel scit se nescire se esse. (Per. IV 776B)*

[p.212]

*Nam et nos, dum disputamus in nobismet invicem efficimur. Siquidem dum intelligo quod intelligis, intellectus tuus efficior, et ineffabili quodam modo in te factus sum. Similiter quando pure intelligis quod ego plane intelligo, intellectus meus efficeris, ac de duobus intellectibus fit unus, ab eo, quod ambo sincere et incunctanter intelligimus, formatus. Verbi gratia, ut ex numeris exemplum introducamus: senarium numerum suis partibus esse aequalem intelligis; et ego similiter intelligo, et intelligere te intelligo, sicut et me intelligis intelligere. Uterque noster intellectus unus fit senario numero formatus, ac per hoc et ego in te creor, et tu in me crearis. Non enim aliud sumus, aliud noster intellectus; vera siquidem ac summa nostra essentia est intellectus contemplatione veritatis specificatus. (Per. IV 780B-C)*



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